Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

ANNOUNCING

A Brand New Magazine

EDITED BY

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT

Editor of WEIRD TALES

As a reader of our magazine, WEIRD TALES, we wish to make you acquainted with a new magazine which is now on sale at all newsstands.

For several years we have had a strong demand from our readers for an Oriental story magazine, in which the strange mysteries of the East play the important part.

We have given the matter a great deal of careful thought, and have decided to publish a high-class all-fiction magazine specializing in glamorous stories of the East. Its name is:

We will have the co-operation of our good old authors, as well as many new ones. They are all very enthusiastic about this new magazine, principally because there are today very few good stories of this kind in print, and the possibilities are so great in this colorful field.

Asia, land of mystery, land of intrigues, and red war, and languorous loves, home of Harun al-Rashid the Just, Tamerlane the Magnificent and Genghis Khan the Red Scourge—Asia offers the most fascinating field for fiction in the whole world. The glamor of the Orient—Samarkand, Bagdad, the fabled cities of Cathay, Xanadu, home of Kubla Khan; Bokhara, Yokohama, Singapore—the very names breathe romance and glamor of mystery and hidden things. As Frank Owen says in SINGAPORE NIGHTS: "The East never sleeps, never rests. Its maze of confusion and mystery flows onward endlessly."

At last a fascinating magazine is to be devoted entirely to this land of mystery and romance, of adventure and red war. An amazing array of fine stories has already been marshaled for the first few issues of ORIENTAL STORIES. Among the marvelous tales which have been prepared for your delectation are:

SINGAPORE NIGHTS, by Frank Owen. A romantic, thrilling tale of Singapore, the meeting-place of the Orient, and a startling strange adventure therein.

THE COBRA DEN, by Paul Ernst. A weird mixture of snakes, Arab intrigue and the African desert, cooked into a delectable story-dish by a well-known writer.

EYES OF THE DEAD, by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner. Mahbub, the Afghan hillman, went far and braved direful perils to avenge the death of his kinsman, Yar Khan.

THE MAN WHO LIMPED, by Otis Adelbert Kline. The strange and disagreeable adventure of Hamed the Attar and how he overcame his perverse hatred of women.

THE DESERT WOMAN, by Richard Kent. A modern Thais came out of the Great Desert and attempted to lure a priest, with strange consequences.

THE SLAVE OF JUSTICE, by E. Hoffmann Price. The story of a minor Asiatic potentate who had to pass judgment of death on his own son.

THE WHITE QUEEN, by Francis Hard. A strange tale of a chess game played in the heart of the Arabian desert, with human beings for pieces and life and death as stakes.

THE GREEN JADE GOD, by John Briggs. An unusual story about three enemies, one blind, one deaf and one tongueless, who were forced into a strange comradeship—a story of India and a native idol.

THE TIGER'S EYE, by Pearl Norton Swet. A strange curse followed the killing of the tiger with the blue eye—a weird story of Bengal and a disastrous tiger-hunt.

THE CIRCLE OF ILLUSION, by Lottie Lesh. A peculiar story was that told by the Collector of Antiques—a tale of the Unfinished Buddha and the love of a Japanese priest for the daughter of the emperor.

FINGER OF KALI, by Bernice T. Banning. A story of the Sacred Bull of Shiva the Destroyer and a dagger with strangely potent qualities.

GOLDEN ROSEBUD, by Dorota Flatau. A grim story of a blighted Chinese romance and the unutterable cruelty of China under the Mandarins.

THE VEILED LEOPARD, by G. G. Pendarves. A thrilling story of the slave trade and a half-breed Arab leader whom the Touaregs called the Leopard.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, by S. B. H. Hurst. A striking tale of the clash of Russian and British interests in Islam—of a fierce Afghan of the Durani Clan, the slave region of Ruba el Khali and the adventurous secret service man, Bugs Sinnat.

These and many other wonderful tales are in store for the readers of this newest and greatest of fiction magazines. Every story will be utterly strange and unusual; no humdrum tales will be offered to you, but instead a fascinating collection of stories that breathe the very spirit of the Orient. It will be well illustrated by competent artists and will be edited by Farnsworth Wright, present editor of WEIRD TALES. We hope you will give this new magazine a warm welcome.

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Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for November, 1930

Cover Design ..... C. C. Senf
Illustrating a scene in "A Million Years After"

The Eyrie 580
A chat with the readers

Teotihuacan ..... Alice I'Anson 588
Verse; decoration by C. C. Senf

A Million Years After ..... Katharine Metcalf Roof 590
Out of a wind-swept desert of Asia came a monstrosity that spread panic terror in a quiet American town

Tales of the Werewolf Clan:

1. The Master Strikes ..... H. Warner Munn 599
The first of a series of unusual stories narrating the adventures of the progeny of the Werewolf of Ponkert

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

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[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

The Uncharted Isle——Clark Ashton Smith 605
Utterly strange adventure in an utterly strange land—an extraordinary tale by the author of "The End of the Story"

Kings of the Night——Robert E. Howard 609
Kull, king of Valusia, came from out of the mists of his Shadow Kingdom to lead the fight against the Roman legionaries

The Cosmic Cloud——Edmond Hamilton 631
A cloud of blackness beat against the edges of our universe, threatening its crowded suns and worlds with annihilation

Stealthy Death——Seabury Quinn 649
Jules de Grandin pits himself against the murderous guile of East Indian dakaits—a tale of grisly assassinations

Great Ashtoreth——Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 673
Verse

The Portal to Power (Part 2)——Greye La Spina 674
A four-part serial story about a cult of devil-worshippers in a hidden valley of the Rocky Mountains

Fungi From Yuggoth:
4. **Antarktos**——H. P. Lovecraft 692
Verse

The Debt——Eric A. Leyland 693
For twenty years Marston dodged the wraith of the man he had sent to a shameful death—then came the gruesome tragedy

A Message From Mars——Derek Ironside 699
A gripping radio story of communication from another planet and the startling climax of an expedition to Mars

Weird Story Reprint:
Siesta——Alexander L. Kielland 703
A bizarre story about a pianist whose playing was imbued with diabolical power and weird potentialities

The Cypress-Bog——Donald Wandrei 714
Verse

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THE omission of the customary Jules de Grandin story by Seabury Quinn from our September issue has called forth a volley of letters from the readers wanting to know what is the big idea. The little French occultist has so captured the admiration of the readers of WEIRD TALES that some among you seem to take it as a personal insult if we do not publish one of Quinn's fascinating stories in every issue. The popularity of the de Grandin stories is never more in evidence than when the Quinn fans seem faced with the loss of the mercurial Frenchman's adventures. Therefore let us hasten to assure you that we do not intend to deprive you of the pleasure you derive from reading these fascinating tales. The adventures of Jules de Grandin will appear for a long time to come in WEIRD TALES, as long as Seabury Quinn keeps his health and his never-failing flow of imagination.

F. W. Sarles, of Cincinnati, writes to the editor: "That bird who complains about Edmond Hamilton and his 'everlasting Interstellar Patrol' is all wet. Let's have some more stories about that crowd of go-getters at an early date. Incidentally, in *Pigmy Island* Friend Hamilton showed he could write a darn good story without having recourse to the happenings of space. I noticed there was no story in the last issue by Seabury Quinn. How come? There should never be a WEIRD TALES published without at least one story in it wherein the little Frenchman twists the tail of at least one demon, vampire, hoot owl, or what not."

Edward C. Davis, of Knoxville, Ohio, who writes that he is an attendant on night duty in an insane asylum, says: "WEIRD TALES is the only magazine that I will read. I consider it a lucky day when I first saw it on a news stand years ago. Since then I have not missed a copy, and I can say that it is getting better and better. My favorite author, of course, is that super-penman, Seabury Quinn. I don't see how he does it. He has Poe backed clear off the map. Why do you not reprint that wonderful story of some few years ago called *Teoquitla the Golden?* I feel sure the readers would enjoy re-reading it."

An interesting letter from New Zealand comes from G. W. Hockley, of Christchurch: "In the course of many years of reading of all sorts of periodicals, this is the first time I have ever written in to comment, but I have derived so much genuine pleasure from WEIRD TALES that I trust you will be good enough to accept my sincere congratulations on publishing something absolutely in a class by itself, and allow me to make a few comments and suggestions. It is exactly a year since I first made

(Continued on page 582)

Are You Bashful?

NERVOUS?
EMBARRASSED?
SHY?

NO WONDER YOU ARE A "STAY-AT-HOME"

DO YOU ever feel embarrassed in the presence of strangers? Are you always bashful and confused when you meet people for the first time or when you are in company of the opposite sex?

ARE you missing all the good things and good times in life just because you are **BASHFUL** and **SHY?**

Girls and Boys, Men and Women who are timid, nervous, self-conscious and easily embarrassed never have much fun. How do you expect anybody to seek your acquaintance and companionship if you lack confidence in yourself? It is not always the good looking attractive men and women that are showered with all the attention.

To be popular—always in demand at parties, and affairs and social gatherings—one must be a good mixer and possess a pleasant personality. Why should you sit at home, feeling blue and out of sorts—no place to go—nobody to see? Stop being bashful and embarrassed when you meet people for the first time or when you are in the company of the opposite sex.

You Are Self-Conscious!

Shame on you! There is no need for you to be nervous and embarrassed. Stop being shy. You can learn how to conquer the terrible fear of your superiors.

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(Continued from page 580)

the acquaintance of what you rightly style the 'unique magazine,' and to say that I have enjoyed each number is putting it mildly. The comments of readers in the Eyrie on the stories and authors are most interesting, and I always turn to this feature first on receiving each month's issue. Of your many talented writers, Lovecraft, of course, is supreme, and I deeply regret having been able to obtain only a few of his stories. May I suggest that in the near future you publish a volume of his complete works? I am sure that it would be greeted with delight by thousands of enthusiasts to whom the weird type of fiction appeals. I know I would have it for my library if it sold at twenty-five dollars a copy! Of your other authors, many are turning out fine work. Seabury Quinn can always be relied upon to provide an interesting half-hour. I have been surprized not to have seen more appreciation of E. F. Benson in the Eyrie. This author, in my opinion, is most consistently good, and the same may be said of Henry S. Whitehead. Robert E. Howard is also excellent. I am, however, inclined to agree with the reader who remarked that Edmond Hamilton's interplanetary yarns are getting rather tiresome. However, I notice that this undoubtedly gifted writer has provided us with one or two different themes lately; but how about another of the type of *The Monster-God of Mamurth,* which in my opinion is one of his best? Regarding reprints (which, by the way, are by no means the least interesting feature of WEIRD TALES), I heartily agree with the many correspondents who have commended these being taken from the past issues of 'our magazine.' After all, a reprint must be an outstanding story, and what more fertile field could you have than the past issues of the magazine? I trust that we shall have a new Lovecraft story soon, and that in the next twelve months or so you will see your way clear to publish his collected stories in one volume."

"I must say a few words in praise of Long's *The Black Druid,*" writes Clark Ashton Smith. "The tale is not only well written, but evokes a genuine horror with illimitable shadowy ramifications. I like it better than anything you have printed for some time past."

K. Bowley, of Ancon, in the Canal Zone, writes to the Eyrie: "Several years ago I bought a WEIRD TALES magazine just out of idle curiosity, and the first story I read was called *Lochinvar Lodge.* Since then I have only missed two copies, on account of illness. In that story at the end the author seemed to give an impression that there might some day be a sequel, and I always wondered if there was. Can you tell me about this? I like the serial, *Earthworms of Karma,* a great deal and can hardly wait for next month's issue for the finish. I always enjoy the Jules de Grandin stories, and I like Seabury Quinn's style at all times." [There has been no sequel to *Lochinvar Lodge.* That story was extravagantly praised by a great number of readers; but at the same time no story ever published in this magazine has been more bitterly attacked. A flood of letters was received from other readers, complaining that the story left the reader in doubt as to the final outcome; in other words, that it was unfinished.—THE EDITORS.]

"My favorite author is Seabury Quinn," writes Walter Gorman, of Worcester, Massachusetts. "Out of all others, I like his stories the best. His *The Man Who Cast No Shadow* and *The House of the Golden Masks* were superb. Cover illustrations for

(Continued on page 584)

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(Continued from page 582)

both stories were perfect. I doubt if any one can secure better stories than Quinn's. Edmond Hamilton's weird-scientific stories are extremely well done, and Eli Colter's stories are great. I have read Colter's *The Last Horror* many times. I positively do not think that the covers or illustrations of W. T. were as bad as some of the readers indicate. They are not rank and obscene. Really, I thought that they were rather artistic. Work by C. C. Senf and Hugh Rankin is exceptionally vivid and colorful. The title sketches of both are excellent. Doak's sketches are good and improving steadily."

Writes Jerome Siegel, of Cleveland, Ohio: "I was pleased to note the change of type in the latest copy of WEIRD TALES. It is soothing to the eye. An intangible change in my attitude toward WEIRD TALES went out with the old type and one much better has come in. I have never written in before, but have decided to do so after reading the unusually fine issue of August. Edmond Hamilton is at his best and he is sure to be acclaimed once more by the readers who had begun to tire of his routine plot. I am glad to learn that he's decided to write stories whose plots are more variable. Another good story was our faithful August W. Derleth's. His short tales are masterpieces of realism. *The Electric Executioner* by Adolphe de Castro was very entertaining. I read this author's *The Last Test* in your magazine some time ago and thought it one of the best weird tales ever written. Edmond Hamilton's *Pigmy Island* is in my opinion easily the best story in the issue. The weird sensation of being but a foot tall and confronted by huge rats was vividly told."

"Much has been debated on who is your best author," writes Charles Rush, Jr., of New York City. "I think H. P. Lovecraft easily takes that degree. For sheer freezing horror and excellent craftsmanship, he is hard to beat. From *The Silver Key* to the latest reprint, *The Rats in the Walls,* he has held a standard unsurpassed by any of your other authors, with the possible exception of Seabury Quinn's *Restless Souls,* Edmond Hamilton's *Crashing Suns* and Robert E. Howard's *The Moon of Skulls.*"

"My vote for the best story in the present issue of WEIRD TALES," writes Carl F. Smith, of Port Felix, Nova Scotia, "goes to Ralph Milne Farley's story, *Another Dracula?* I had decided on *A Visitor From Egypt* before I read Farley's story. Since reading Bram Stoker's masterpiece I did not think any one could write a good vampire story, but this one is different from the usual run. I like weird tales, and the weirder the better. Clark Ashton Smith's stories are great. I would like another tale by Lovecraft, please."

Carrie E. Cash, of Clovis, New Mexico, writes to the editor: "I wish to thank you for the opportunity to subscribe for your new magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES. I have always enjoyed mystery and adventure tales of the Orient, but the new magazine will have to go some to be as good as WEIRD TALES. Farley's story, *Another Dracula?*, is sure going to be great if it ends as well as it starts. And where is Mr. Quinn? How I did miss Jules de Grandin when I failed to find a story about him in the September issue!"

Mrs. Clare Winger Harris, of Lakewood, Ohio, writes: "I have been delighted with the change of type in WEIRD TALES, the new style being much easier to read.

(Continued on page 586)

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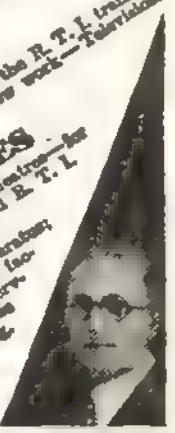

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(Continued from page 584)

Also the magazine is easier to hold. You can't imagine what a relief it is not to have such a strangle grip as was necessary heretofore. Previously I have had my hands get as tired holding WEIRD TALES as if I'd done a hard day's work. We like to have the stories keep us tense, but are not keen on the shape of the magazine itself doing so."

"As I collect the weirdest and most startling tales that I find," writes Montgomery Mulford of Buffalo, New York, "*The Invading Madness* in your September issue will be placed amongst them. It is my favorite story in the issue, though generally scientific fiction does not interest me. About every issue of WEIRD TALES, however, possesses one or two exactly *weird* tales, and these are the variety I enjoy."

A letter from Michael Fogaris of Passaic, New Jersey, says: "I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for over four years, and think that it is constantly improving. I am glad to see that you have increased the size. I think that the concluding part of *Earthworms of Karma* is the best story in the September issue. *The Invading Madness* by H. F. Scotten is second. My favorite writer is Edmond Hamilton. The stories you are reprinting from former issues of WEIRD TALES are all good, but one every three issues is too little. Have one in alternate issues. I should especially like to see a reprint of *Invaders From Outside* by J. Schlossel."

That utterly strange story about insanity broadcast by radio, *The Invading Madness*, by H. F. Scotten, is in a neck-and-neck race for first place in popularity in our September issue with the first installment of Ralph Milne Farley's serial, *Another Dracula?* What is your favorite story in this issue? The letters from readers are always carefully read in the editorial offices of WEIRD TALES, and are frequently the subject of conference. We earnestly strive to print the kind of stories that you, the readers, like to read, and your comments are helpful in keeping the magazine in line with your wishes.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE NOVEMBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
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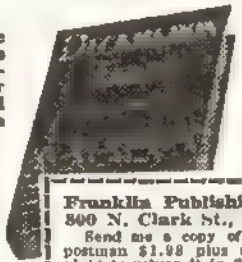

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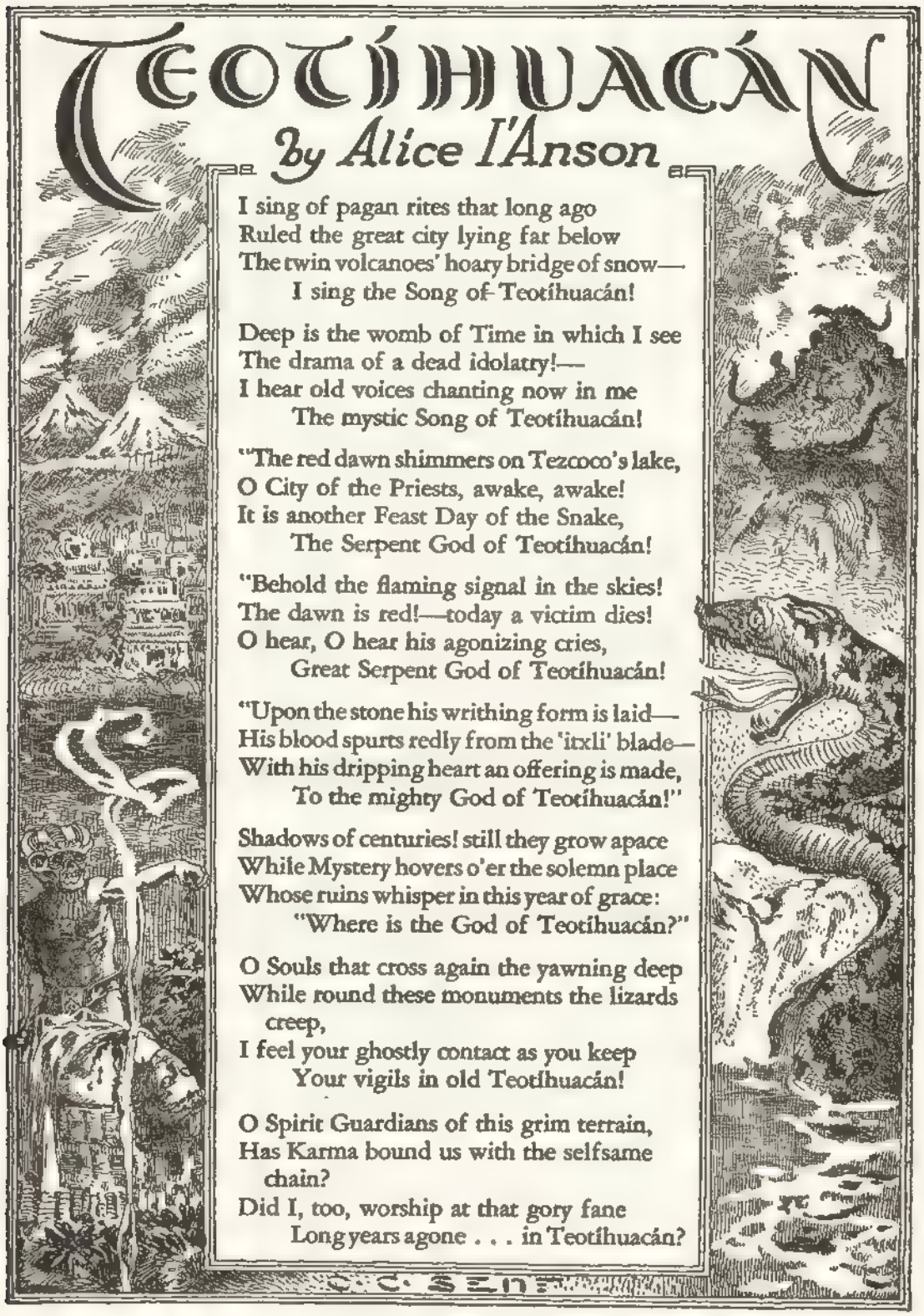


TEOTÍHUACÁN

By Alice I'Anson

I sing of pagan rites that long ago
Ruled the great city lying far below
The twin volcanoes' hoary bridge of snow—
I sing the Song of Teotíhuacán!

Deep is the womb of Time in which I see
The drama of a dead idolatry!—
I hear old voices chanting now in me
The mystic Song of Teotíhuacán!

"The red dawn shimmers on Tezcoco's lake,
O City of the Priests, awake, awake!
It is another Feast Day of the Snake,
The Serpent God of Teotíhuacán!

"Behold the flaming signal in the skies!
The dawn is red!—today a victim dies!
O hear, O hear his agonizing cries,
Great Serpent God of Teotíhuacán!

"Upon the stone his writhing form is laid—
His blood spurts redly from the 'itxli' blade—
With his dripping heart an offering is made,
To the mighty God of Teotíhuacán!"

Shadows of centuries! still they grow apace
While Mystery hovers o'er the solemn place
Whose ruins whisper in this year of grace:
"Where is the God of Teotíhuacán?"

O Souls that cross again the yawning deep
While round these monuments the lizards creep,
I feel your ghostly contact as you keep
Your vigils in old Teotíhuacán!

O Spirit Guardians of this grim terrain,
Has Karma bound us with the selfsame chain?
Did I, too, worship at that gory fane
Long years agone . . . in Teotíhuacán?

NEXT MONTH

Don't miss this group of fine stories scheduled to appear in the December issue of WEIRD TALES on sale November 1.

The Wolf of St. Bonnot

by Seabury Quinn

A thrilling, gripping story of Jules de Grandin in an adventure of extraordinary fascination and blood-chilling action.

The Primeval Pit

by B. Wallis

Huge prehistoric monsters in a lost valley of South America pack this story with thrills.

The Crime on Christmas Night

by Gaston Leroux

A tale of stark horror by the Edgar Allan Poe of France, author of "The Phantom of the Opera."

The Master Fights

by H. Warner Munn

This striking story, the second in "Tales of the Werewolf Clan," deals with the disaster that overtook the Invincible Armada that the Spanish king sent against England.

Men of Steel

by Ainslee Jenkins

A blood-chilling story about the conversion of human beings into robots, or mechanical men.

Something from Above

by Donald Wandrei

Another powerful story of outer space by the author of "The Red Brain."

Burnt Things

by Robert C. Sandison

The town of Como was deserted, but a ghastly happening seared the features and tore at the mind of the man who dropped off the train to seek an old friend there.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the December issue of WEIRD TALES

December Issue on Sale November 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00; Foreign $3.50.
WEIRD TALES 840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill.

A Million Years After

by Katharine Metcalf Roof

MIKE and Tike, standing at the counter of the express office, cast fierce and furtive glances at the great pile of packages awaiting shipment. Suddenly their bird-of-prey eyes came to a standstill and rested upon a box of modest dimensions bearing the arresting label —"Valuation $100,000." They had found what they sought. At the clerk's repeated "What can I do for you?" Tike detached his heavy gaze from the address which Mike's quicker glance had absorbed some minutes earlier.

Mike, also more promptly the spokesman, asked an innocent question which the clerk answered, and with muttered thanks the two left. They had acquired the information they needed—if not from the express clerk.

As they slipped around the corner into the cross-street of darker shadows, their faces, briefly illumined by the arc light, were not of a type to inspire confidence in the passer-by. Mike, who was Celtic only in name, was an undersized, narrow-shouldered youth with sharp black eyes and a broad but unreassuring smile. Tike, who was Celtic in fact, was large and lowering, burly, aggressive.

"Did you get it?" Tike pushed his question sharply.

A bit scornfully, Mike replied, "Learned it by heart."

"Looks easy to me," Tike suggested.

"Dead easy. I know my way all about that little burg. The truck has to pass

"The tall, burly man in the mask obediently kept the express employees covered."

through half a mile of woods to get there. A kid should make it."

"One hundred thousand dollars — jools, of course," reflected Tike.

"Must be," Mike agreed. "Yet there is things besides sparklers that's worth that much to muzeeums."

"Oh, is it a muzeeum it's traveling to!" Tike exclaimed. "I guess I didn't get to readin' that far when the guy jabbed his question at us."

Mike's smile held the superiority of the master mind, but all he said was, "It'll be going out tonight."

2

THE next night but one found Tike and Mike, arrayed in masks and firmly grasping automatics, crouched in the deepest shadows of the wood-bordered road to the museum. For the tenth time Mike cursed the "burg," the "muzeeum," the driver of the truck, under his breath, and for the tenth time Tike,

who disliked all the silent aspects of nature, and everything that was not a city pavement a thousand times more than Mike did, cursed his companion for his characteristic lack of verbal control.

"How do you know what's layin' around us in these here shadows?" he growled. "I allus said you hadn't the brains of a first-class crook. You'll land us both up the river some day with yer loose-mouthed chatter."

A branch crackling, as branches will in the wood, startled the two creatures of the pavement unaccustomed to the mysterious voices of nature, and served to point Mike's words. Tike held his tongue while his heart pounded.

"Somethin's comin'," Mike whispered suddenly, and his grip on his weapon tightened.

The next moment the big express truck on its last delivery, with two men on the front seat, entered the shadows of the road, quite dark now in December at five-thirty. The driver was grumbling.

"To hell with 'em. As if it coudn't 'a' waited till morning. Is the museum in such a hurry fer its old junk it has to get it tonight?"

"Junk mebbe, to our thinkin'," his assistant answered, "but if it's worth one hundred thousand dollars to the museum or anybody else—I'd rather see it in the museum safe than in the office."

He had hardly finished his sentence when a sharp order to halt startled the quiet night silence, and in the road-lights of the truck the expressman saw two masked men standing in the path. The command "Hands up" quickly followed, and silently the trapped men on the express truck obeyed orders. They reported afterward that the smaller of the two bandits took command. "Keep 'em covered while I spot it," he softly ordered.

The tall burly man in the mask obediently kept the express employees covered, while his partner entered the body of the truck, and with the aid of his electric flashlight went swiftly through its contents. It was lightly loaded with a few trunks and less than a dozen smaller packages. Mike's task was soon over. With a box little over a foot long, bearing the address he had memorized, tightly grasped in his hand he jumped down, and joined Tike in the road.

"Sorry, but I guess we have to keep you here a little while," he informed his captives. Holding the package in one hand and his automatic in the other, Mike occultly commanded his confederate. Tike then proceeded to gag and bind the two express employes and place them in the body of their own truck, which was then drawn up beside the road to minimize the chance of investigation by the late passer-by.

It was soon over. Long practise had made Tike expert at this maneuver. He soon joined his companion in the road.

The sinister black mask of the smaller man faced the two human bundles in the truck an instant.

"All over," he murmured with an expressive wave of the hand, and below the edge of the black mask flickered the shadow of that unreassuring smile.

3

BUT the smile faded an hour later when in the shelter of a shack beside a swampy river several leagues from the robbed museum, Mike and Tike eagerly pried open the cover of the precious box. The flood of resultant profanity is not to be recorded here; for within the multitudinous wrappers that might well have protected the famous Kohinoor, lay a small oval object about six inches in length that strongly resembled a stale roll from the baker's. In the small capable palm of the thief under the concentrated

rays of his flashlight, it seemed, indeed, as valueless an object as could well be imagined.

"What the hell is it?" roared Tike when he could bring himself to the point of articulation. "Nothing but a ——— ——— soft stone!"

Mike, with a mind always more concentrated upon essentials, eyed their find darkly. "Either it's a spoof of some sort, or else——"

"Some boob spoofin' some other boob," growled Tike. "That's it."

"Or if it should be a stunt pulled by some dick hopin' to get us," Mike concluded slowly.

As his companion remained silent in sheer panic at this suggestion, Mike continued. "In which case the best trick we can turn is to get rid of it."

"That's easy. Trow it in the creek," suggested Tike viciously. He longed to smash the disappointing ovoid in Mike's hand. But he was fairly well disciplined out of impulsive action by several years' association with Mike.

Mike rose as if to carry out the suggestion, then stood uncertainly gazing down at the mysterious object. "There's things that goes to muzeeums," he declared slowly, "that don't look like nothing to us, but that for some reason or other, *they* sets great store by. Damned if I can see how a thing that looks like this should be any good to a mortal being, an' yet——"

"Sure it's small enough to hang on to if you tink that," said Tike.

"Yet on the chance that it's a trap," continued Mike thinking aloud, "I'd like to get it out of ma hands tonight. Then wait till we hear the big noise about it bein' lost. Even then we can't be too sure. That all might be a part of the trap. But after we've waited, an' kep' our eyes an' ears open fer a while, we should bring it out again—if it is worth anythin' like the story on that there box."

"That's the dope," agreed Tike promptly. "We'll hide it somewhere around here."

"We'll bury it and burn the box in the stove," planned Mike, indicating a battered wood-stove in the corner of the shack.

Presently a small fire roared in the rickety stove, and when the incriminating box had been reduced to ashes, Mike, followed by Tike, went down toward the sluggish winding stream, black and silent under a moonless sky, on the banks of which the shack was built. There in the unfrozen earth that was still soft in the mild December weather, they buried the object that resembled a stale baker's roll, out of human sight.

4

THE abandoned chicken farm to which the shack belonged, lay in one of those unpopulated well-wooded districts still to be found in every state of this wide land. Because it was a thinly populated region it lent itself to an industry that has been widespread and profitable since the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment. One early evening in July, seven months after the brief visit of Tike and Mike, a group of men sat about in the very shack that had been the scene of the crook's disappointment.

A celebration was in process. The five men who shared in the large and easy profits of their trade were at the moment foregoing income for intake. In short, they had, for some time now, been sampling their own wares. A certain red-faced gentleman called Jake was very merry, but another long-faced Scotchman called Andy seemed filled with forebodings. A third, called Pat by the others, was giving way to flights of Celtic fancy.

Of the two remaining, one, the youngest, addressed as Eddy, was inclined to be maudlin, and Ranger, the fifth, a gray-haired sinner, leaned peacefully dozing against the wall.

Pat was holding the floor with a long dramatic narrative to which Jake and Andy gave an incomplete attention.

"There's nothing in it," declared Andy decidedly when Pat paused for another draft. "I don't believe it. How *could* there be a serpent waving its head about among the treetops? Who ever seen such a thing?"

"Only it ain't a serpent, it ain't a serpent at all," cried Pat. "Did you ever hear once of a serpent that munched trees and thrashed about among the bushes like a bull? Silent, they is, like the grave, an' close to the earth. Who ever heard of a snake making the big noise like a bull?"

"Bughouse," the opinion came suddenly from the somnolent Ranger, unexpectedly waking in his corner. "Don't never let any one hear you talking like that, my boy, or they'll put you away."

Startled by this sudden denunciation from the apparently sleeping Ranger, Pat remained a moment staring, mouth open, but he did not long lack a defender.

"Bughouse yourself," returned the cheerful Jake warmly. "Let the lad tell his story. It reads like one of them wild animal movies, from Africky. Tell us again where was it you seen the beast?"

Thus encouraged, Celtic fire flamed up again. " 'Twas out there not twenty feet away," Pat began in a hissing whisper. " 'Twas the night I come here—you know —with the big crates of vanilla soda."

A general laugh greeted this familiar family joke. "All at once I heard a sound yonder in the bushes, a thrashing and snapping and floundering about, like somebody's cow had got loose and tangled herself in her rope. I stood still and listened. An' the next thing I knew I saw something long and thin over the treetops against the sky — a long neck like, endin' in a head like a serpent, only bigger, waving about over the top of that tallest pine yonder." All of Pat's audience was listening now under the spell of the dramatic Celtic gift as his voice sank again to a whisper. "I stood still and listened, and I stared into the deep shadows —an' what do you think I seen? Dim-like, but no mistakin' it, a great body like a turtle or a lizard on its hind legs, only it was a lizard the size of the biggest elephant you ever seen to the Zoo. An' when I come nearer I could see a great tail like a lizard's, trailin' out far behint —slappin' about."

Pat paused, but no voice broke the charmed silence. He had his audience now. Even Ranger, fully awake, leaned forward staring. Jake was the first to break the spell, his voice also a whisper:

"What was it?"

Pat leaned back. "That's what I've been askin' meself ever since," he breathed. "In God's name what *was* it? Not like anything you ever met before on this wide earth."

A rude laugh from Ranger broke the charmed silence. "Sure you've had more than your share of the hootch, Pat MacDonald," he cried. "We all know what it is when folks sees turtles the size of elephants with snakes' heads, climbin' trees and threshin' up the underbrush."

"It's gospel truth," Pat cried, his voice rising. "I take me oath. Not a drop of the stuff had I touched, and that is what I seen out there by the river—I'll swear it by all the saints."

A silence followed his impassioned declaration. Pat's earnestness had recaptured his audience. And while they sat there, their imaginations roused by the picture his words had conjured up, a sound without broke the silence, a not

unusual sound, the crackling of branches, yet all snapped to attention.

"Hist!" whispered Pat, leaning forward with raised finger. The bootleggers listened, holding their breath. No need to hold the breath. The noise was loud enough to be heard in the midst of one of their most heated arguments.

"Like a great cow loose in the bushes —you've said it, Pat MacDonald," cried Jake. "Let's have a look at your animal."

Jake rose, and Ranger, scoffing, was on his unsteady feet in an instant. Andy, the gloomy member of the party, and Eddy, who had showed a tendency to tears, joined more slowly. It was Pat himself, now presumably about to show the verification of his own story, who was the last to stand up.

"Come on, man, what's holding you?" Ranger rallied him rudely. "'Twas a good story you give us. Who cares if it wan't true?"

Thus goaded, Pat rose. "It's *because* it's true, and I've small mind to see the reptile again that I'm holdin' back," he cried. "But I'm coming. Never fear, I'm coming."

In a body they left the one-time chicken house and standing beside the silent stream faced the direction of the sound. A moment they stood there; then Ranger felt the steely grip of Pat's fingers on his arm. "Over there—by the big maple—look!"

Ranger looked. In frozen silence they all looked. An exclamation of terror from Eddy broke the spell. A moment the boy stood staring white-faced at the moving head and long snake-like neck vaguely visible in the treetops; then with a shrill cry he fled from the spot.

Andy, who had a revolver in his hip pocket, took a firmer grip on the handle. "Come on, boys, let's finish it, whatever it is. It's no sight for a Christian."

But Jake, his ruddy cheeks now pale, protested. "How do yer know yer little bullet would kill it? Where would you be shootin' it? Up in that little head it has at the top? Or in that great body below like a lizard the size of a barn?"

But Andy and Pat were ready for the strange hunting, and Ranger, a moment ago jeering and skeptical, followed at a safe distance with Jake.

The creature apparently had not noticed their approach as yet. It continued its leisurely munching in the treetops. A few yards away from it, Pat stumbled and crashed down in the bushes, making a great noise in the silent night. Andy turned upon him swearing fiercely, and Jake shamelessly took to his heels, but Ranger did not turn or flee, for he had discovered a strange thing.

"It's deaf! The thing is *deaf!*" he exclaimed. "It's not heard a single sound! Shoot away, Andy, you're the marksman. Pot it now."

"Didn't I tell you 'twas a kind of a serpent?" Pat whispered. Ranger observed that though the young Irishman made no move to turn back his teeth were chattering.

"It neither hears nor smells us," Ranger continued. "Yet by some instinct, all creatures should know when something human is coming their way."

The three men approached, moving more slowly each step, until they were within about fifty feet of the creature; then something — whether sight or instinct—seemed to warn it of their presence, for the small turtle-like head withdrew suddenly into the shelter of the treetops, and the sound of crackling branches grew louder as the huge creature crashed and thrashed about. Suddenly it

freed itself and made a dash for the open spaces. A moment it stood fully revealed against the sky as it ran to cover, a vast creature of impossible outlines such as Pat described, yet somehow hunted, helpless. Shaped like a lizard of titanic proportions, it ran upon its hind legs, its short forelegs which ended in huge claws dangling like hands close to its breast. The next moment the thrashing and crashing of branches came again as the creature apparently dropped and found cover in the swampy woods beyond.

"Mother of Mike!" breathed Pat. "Who ever made a thing like o' that? . . . sure . . . one of God's mistakes."

Perhaps it was due to the evaporative nature of that brand of courage unjustly known as Dutch that no one moved to follow up the hunt that night. The next day they changed their base of operation to another place.

5

STRANGE rumors were circulating about the countryside.

Little Lily Storms, a runaway at nightfall, stumbled home in hysterics talking about a big beast in the woods. Old Timothy Dole ran into a neighbor's kitchen babbling about a lizard the size of a house. Last of all, Silas Grayson, a silent, God-fearing man, a selectman and a deacon in the church, solemnly testified that there unquestionably *was* an uncanny beast of some sort in the Pulsifers' Woods. This time the folks of Pulham Corners listened with awe and respect to Si Grayson's story.

"It sounds like the beast in *Revelations,*" said the white-haired Elijah Williams, another deacon, and muttered something under his breath to the effect that the way things had been going for the last few years, he'd been looking for some sort of a Day of Judgment.

"Seems like you ought to investigate the creature," observed his wife who was stout and capable.

Elijah hedged. "Who's goin' to do it?"

"Mebbe it might be poisoned," suggested his resourceful wife reflectively.

"Mebbe," agreed Elijah uneasily. He carried the suggestion to Si Grayson, whom he found in the corner grocery, seated upon a barrel. Si snorted strangely.

"If there's enough rat an' roach poison in all the stores of Pulham Corners to do it," he said. "But who's to know that the creature might relish it? And how would you go to work to spread the pizen about?"

Elijah's face fell. "No denyin' that them is difficult questions," he admitted. "Yet we can't have the creature livin' an' *growin'* perhaps"—Si shuddered visibly at the suggestion—"in our woods. S'pose there's more of 'em about? A hull family——"

Si Grayson rose abruptly from the flour barrel he had been occupying. "I don't feel inclined to talk about it just now," he stated shortly. And gathering up a goodly package of canned things from the counter the selectman took his departure.

Elijah, thus left, stared ruefully. "It's all very well to make objections and stop thinkin' about it. But we can't have the thing goin' on right here in our woods," he appealed to his fellow villagers.

The group in the grocery — among whom was a gray-haired man of uneasy actions whose first name was Ranger— agreed with Elijah that something must be done to exterminate the mysterious creature—but what?

6

IT WAS late in October that Mike and Tike decided to make another trip to the abandoned chicken farm. The theft of the box from the express truck had

proved the most puzzling incident of their adventurous lives, for there had been no outcry about their loss from the museum, and the crooks, fearing "a plant," had left their disappointing find where they had buried it; but one day several months afterward, Mike had discovered a small paragraph in his evening paper which disclosed the nature of a loss suffered by a certain richly-endowed out-of-town museum the previous December. Much of what followed was Greek to Mike, but he had a quick brain, and after intensive cogitating over the item and a visit to the public library he arrived at a rough and ready understanding of the nature of the stolen treasure. The question then arose as to how he and his partner were to make capital of it. That was a knotty question, but as soon as it was decided, Mike and Tike might have been seen getting off the train at the railway station nearest the abandoned chicken farm where the museum's mysterious treasure had been interred.

It was gratifying to find the abandoned shack still standing and still abandoned. Traces of some more recent occupation were not lacking, yet nothing more recent, Mike decided, than a day in last July when the occupants seemed to have departed in haste leaving a newspaper dated July 3rd.

After smelling about the rendezvous like a couple of suspicious dogs, Mike and Tike, each bearing a small sharp trowel and a flashlight, went out to seek their buried treasure. Mike, an exact person after his kind, had expected to strike it at once, but at the end of an hour's laborious work the buried object remained unlocated.

"Mighty queer," grumbled Mike, who thought concisely, while Tike swore picturesquely. "Them museum folks ain't recovered it—that I know. Nobody else couldn't have knowed where to look fer it. It must be here. It's only a question of time before we spot it—yet I coulda swore——"

Again they bent their backs to the unaccustomed physical toil, but still they could not find the missing object. It was just as Tike had called a halt and disgustedly seated himself upon a near-by rock that the sound of a mighty thrashing in the bushes broke the silence.

"Somebody's cow or hoss must be loose," said Tike, after listening a moment. "Better smooth over some o' that loose earth, hadn't we? Some one or other'll be comin' by."

Mike, realizing the wisdom of Tike's suggestion, began hastily leveling the loosened earth while Tike sat disconsolately upon the rock, his flashlight casting weird arrows of light into the shadows of the woods. Suddenly a shriek burst from him, the like of which his associate in many years of criminal adventure had never heard before.

Instantly, at attention, Mike straightened up, and looked, and the cry of sheer animal terror that burst from his lips was more like the howl of an animal than the cry of a human being. The next instant with one accord, the two men took to their heels.

At the same instant the object of their terror lunged toward them. Mike, physically stronger, although smaller, stumbling through the underbush, got a head start, toward the road. As in a nightmare he ran without power to escape. Close behind him now . . . the thudding of a huge soft body against the tree trunks, and against the branches the rattle of claws . . . nearer, nearer, yet strangely, without sound of any sort from its serpent throat, with no pant of quickened breath . . . it was close behind him now—close, but only a few feet away was

his goal, the open door of the shack, a chance for his life. His heart fairly bursting through his body, Mike redoubled his efforts. The next moment, almost within hand reach of the latch, a tough-fibered vine tripped him—in the next—the sharp sensation of ripping claws, red-hot stabs, fierce flashes of pain in his quivering flesh, then—oblivion.

7

IN DEACON PULSIFER'S hardware store, which was also the postoffice at Pulham Corners—a group of men sat about on barrels and boxes discussing the coming election. In the midst of a high-voiced nasal harangue of prophecy, Deacon Williams was interrupted by a thumping crash against the front door of the shop, and the next minute a wild-faced man, dishevelled, with torn clothing, utterly breathless, fell into their midst.

"Quick! get your guns, it's coming," he panted. "For God's sake get a move on before it gets us!"

Most of the group stared open-mouthed, but Silas Grayson looked around suddenly serious. "*What's* coming?" he demanded quickly.

"It—it—God knows what it is!" Tike panted, "but it ran after us—out a there —in the woods——"

It chanced that Sam Hill, the village constable, was of the group, and his official eye had taken account of a bulge in Tike's pocket. "I see you tote a gun yourself," he said. "Why didn't you take a shot at it, whatever it is?"

"It scared me out of my life," Tike admitted. "So it would you if you'd 'a' seen it. But I know mighty well *someone's* got to finish it, or it'll be the end of all of us."

Sam Hill strode to the door and opened it. Silas Grayson followed. They passed out to the patch of ragged grass before the shop illumined by the light from the store window.

Then they saw it. They described it variously afterward. Something like a kangaroo with a long serpent neck, yet even in the uncertain night light, somehow loathsomely different, uncanny. It ran along on its hind legs down the road with a weird rattling of its claws against the stones. Then Sam Hill—he was a brave man and deserved the honor of wearing his badge—lifted his automatic and fired. He did not know till the next day whether or not his bullet had found its mark. All they did know was that as they stood there huddled in a group, the great dreadful thing ran past them darkening the sky—diffusing a strange odor, musk-like, dank, like a creature of the swamp—ran on past them along the post road toward the city where stood the museum that Mike and Tike had robbed of its ambiguous treasure a year ago.

It was not until several hours afterward, when the men were gradually becoming normal again, that the constable made a suggestion. "If it runs past the museum maybe somebody'll ketch and stuff it. Then, folks, we can know what it is."

But Silas Grayson, a strong man and no coward, shuddered and shut his eyes.

"I don't want to see it again, anyhow or anywheres," he said, "stuffed or alive. I don't *never* want to look at it again."

AND so by a strange stroke of destiny they found the creature done to death at the end of its long run by Sam Hill's bullet. It lay blocking the roadway, shutting off the vista of the museum through the trees, and a goodly portion of

(Continued on page 719)

Tales of the Werewolf Clan....

BY H. WARNER MUNN

1. The Master Strikes

1. The Cat Organ

IT WAS a fête day in Brussels, in the year of our Lord, 1549.

All morning the fountains of the city had spouted free wine for the flushed and happy populace. Fragments of cakes, no longer in demand though they had no price, lay beneath the benches for the pigeons to peck at undisturbed. The people had turned their backs upon the fountains and the booths, and now packed the edges of the principal streets, for a singular procession was en route toward the palace.

Philip II, King of Spain, sat beside his father, the Emperor, upon a palace balcony as the strange parade came by. At first the royal guest, object of the holiday, found little to amuse him in the sight, although the people beneath rocked and howled in uproarious hilarity.

At the head of the parade marched an enormous bull, its snowy coat brushed to a high gloss. Between his horns was balanced a tiny scarlet devil, from which shot fireworks, which were replaced as often as they burned out, by a monkey whose body had been completely shaven and gilded.

Following four trumpeting youths, who created bizarre sounds from strange and complicated instruments, came a small bear seated on a prancing horse, the ears and tail of which had been cut.

Then a dancing girl, gaudy with gay

ribbons, tinkling from head to toe with tiny bells as she twisted and turned in mockery before an aged crone who followed, bent, withered and lame, bearing a bunch of fagots for the pyre upon which she was to be burned at evening.

Introspective, prayers upon her lips, concerned only with her soul and its salvation, she marched, while above, Philip turned to his father with a sneer.

"So should the wrath of God be visited upon every heretic, sire," he said, and the Emperor nodded, but half aware of his son's remark. His attention was fixed upon something beneath.

Below, there strutted the Archangel Saint Michael in gold and purple robes, holding the scales of justice in his hands which he shook from side to side as he pompously bowed to the throng—a very caricature of things holy.

The Emperor's face purpled and his pudgy fist came down upon his knee.

"Now, by our Lady," he swore, "these fools go too far; Holy Church is attainted by this boor! Guard——!" Philip touched his arm.

"Nay, father," he urged, "let them mock if they will. To seize him would halt the parade. Your men can reach him at any time, but now see yonder what comes!"

Approaching was the quaintest conceit of the mad company—a chariot on which a bear played the organ. But such an organ!

In place of pipes, twenty small boxes held each a cat; the protruding tails were bound to the keys of the clavier by cords so that it was only necessary to press one of these keys to produce a hellish squawk of pain.

As it came beneath the balcony, the organist sounded chords, running up and down the scale until all twenty cats were furiously yelling in agony. But above their piercing shrieks and the applause of the crowd, there was plainly heard a hearty guffaw from above. Philip, the usually melancholy king, was laughing. The procession was a glorious success. The royal guest was pleased.

The procession left the vicinity of the palace and entered a poorer quarter of the city. Here the cat organ and the bear-ridden horse turned aside down a mean and reeking street, while the others went on.

Picking their way among the litter and heaps of refuse, they entered a narrow alley and here in a rickety shed the bear-skins were removed and disclosed two men.

The one who had bestrode the horse was a dwarf about four feet high, wrinkled, old and ugly. His limbs were thin almost to emaciation, but he scurried about with a nervous vitality that belied his seeming age.

"Guillame," said the other man, "your invention was the success that you predicted. We made that glum Philip hold his sides!"

The dwarf creaked out a rusty giggle as he unloosened the cats from their boxes and placed them in a cage that stood in a corner of the shed.

"Ey. It was good music to hear, but *I* liked it better than the King. Was it not my friend's music? The success and the honor is yours, Baudoin Gunnar. I merely supplied the idea; you made the machine, found the instruments and furnished the sweet gallimaufry of yowls. I loved every note of that music, because it was *you* that was making it, and I knew while listening that the organ would bring you to a notable eminence among men!"

There was a faint suspicion of a sneer in the last words, but Gunnar did not perceive the subtle meaning behind them and smiled.

"Well said," he approved. "It should bring me notice and perhaps fortune, cer-

tainly enough to get us and the boy out of this stinking den."

He was interrupted by the boy in question, who darted into the shed, a bright-eyed, vivacious little lad of about twelve, who greeted his father with a hug. Suddenly his face changed as an expression of anger mingled with pity came upon it.

He had seen the cage of cats, some still mewing in pain, others with their yellow and green eyes fixed upon Gunnar with a baleful glare as they paced up and down the cage, picking their way among those cats which lay licking strained ligaments and bruised spots.

"Father," cried the boy in a high clear tone, "you must not hurt my cats. I am ashamed to look at them. How will they be my friends any more, if you do this to them?"

"Why should you wish to be friends with cats?"

"I would be friends with all things! Look at poor Gaultier, see how he bleeds where the cords cut his tail! And Tybalt there, my little Tibbie who was so gentle and liked to be petted; how he hates you now!"

He pointed at a gaunt brindle animal that switched its tail viciously against its sides as it eyed the elder Gunnar, ever and again tearing slivers out of the wooden bars with its long claws.

"Aye, the beast would like to get at me," mused the man pleasantly, "but I will take that out of him the next time we play the organ."

The dwarf chuckled in a corner, a harsh dry chuckle, and the other looked at him, scowling.

"Come, lad, let's to table. I hunger enormously."

"When I tell Tib how sorry I am." And the boy pressed against the bars, his bare arms in among the pain-maddened cats.

"God!" muttered Gunnar and stopped aghast. The cats, instead of clawing at the exposed arms, were seeking the strokes and pats he was giving them, purring answers of contentment to his croons of sympathy.

Gunnar reached out to snatch the boy away. The scene changed at once. The twenty cats as one surged against the bars, spitting, snarling, clawing to get out upon their tormentor, and Gunnar drew back.

"Like you, don't they?" grinned the dwarf. "What if they should get out some night when you are sleeping here in the shed?"

Gunnar forced a laugh.

"No danger of that. I look at the bars every night and test the latch myself. I've no fancy to be cat-meat. Come, lad; hungry?"

The three left the shed, and with their departure the snarling died down until only the munching and stamping of the white horse was heard as evening came and the shed grew dark.

That night, Gunnar told the lad why he hated cats, and they sat long at table, the dwarf silent, darting a red-eyed glance at one or the other as the tale progressed.

He told of his mother, Ivga Brenryk, daughter of a werewolf, and the frightful bargain she had made with the Master, an elemental being who hated the entire race of mankind and whose dearest wish was the extermination of the species of Gunnar, in return for a trick that Ivga's father had played upon him. The boy learned how Ivga had fled to France in company with a traveling troubadour who had proved to be in reality the son of a noble in Blois.

He was told that during her life Blois had gained the name of the city of werewolves, owing to the vast quantities of the monsters that were reputed to make their home in and around the city.

He also learned how Ivga had made a compact, in a trance, in return for her life, that one of her descendants in each generation should become the slave of the Master; how she had revealed to her seven sons, as she lay dying, the dreadful secret, and the fear that came over each of them that he might be the one in that generation. And finally he learned why his father hated cats.

"It is a matter of common knowledge, Theophide, that if a cat leap over the dead body of a human, that corpse when laid in the grave will rise and walk abroad at night, seeking the blood of men that his own filthy existence may be prolonged. These are the living dead, a horror and a curse to humanity. Cursed be they and cursed be the agent that makes them what they are.

"The traveler at night rides in dread of his life, thinking of his doom should one of these taste his blood, for upon his death, he too would become a vampire. And should he hear, as he passes through the forests, a low cry like a sick child or a woman in distress, he crosses his breast with shaking fingers and rides on, for he knows that somewhere, near by, there sits the cunning, coaxing vampire, luring the unwary to the spot where it waits, all bloody from its latest victim!

"Your grandmother died, and her body was not cold before some demon entered into our peaceful souls and we were quarreling, a thing which we brothers had never done, quarreling in greed, an ignoble dispute over the division of our inheritance.

"Careless words led to hard words and your uncle Anatol, the eldest by a moment, struck Hugo his twin. Hugo drew a dagger. Steel flashed and Anatol died there in the hall, a great wonder and surprize in his eyes, and while he still breathed, Hugo knew his sin and grieved, for they two had lived as one.

"Crying 'Wait, brother, I come!' before we could snatch the dagger from him it was in his breast, he falling across Anatol, holding him close as his lips touched his brother's cheek.

"But a few seconds and we seven had become five. Then in a dark corner we saw a swirling gray mist like river fog and from it came a voice, a strange, dry, unhuman voice — oh, horrid to hear! — it chuckled and gloated and was pleased——!"

Gunnar shivered at the remembrance.

"It said, 'Children of Ivga, the Master keeps his word. Brother slays brother and the curse begins!' And straight from the mist a cat came leaping toward us, bounded across Anatol, circled and leaped over Hugo, fled into the mist, and it and the mist were gone together.

"So we knew their intended fate and why the cat had come. It was not the fact that the cat had leapt across the dead that had made them cursed. The cat, witches' familiar, mysterious and too-knowing night animal, sharing the secrets of midnight with the bat and the ghouls that ride the wind, had been but the messenger of the Evil One to bid the corpses rise and come to do his bidding!

"Nothing could have tempted us to remain in that castle of accursed memories. We feared that the Master would again appear and take toll of us and we hoped that by separating we would throw him off the track and some of us might live in peace. One of us went to Russia and one to the south to trade among the Isles of Spice; another went to Germany, while my younger brother went to Scotland, and I came here.

"We married, surely; we were only human and no monks, and though we knew our children were in like danger we hoped, each of us, that *ours* might be safe.

"Before we went, we took what we desired as a remembrance of our home. Theobald in Scotland has our father's rapier, 'Widow-maker,' the first to be made. He has also half of a key, which unlocks a tomb in the grounds of our castle in Blois. In this tomb we placed a book that tells how the curse began and how the Master was first defeated. A holy bishop, one of our family, lay buried there and we believed that the Master dare not harm the book, for we hoped that by it we might find knowledge that would aid us to fight the monster. Yet lest one of us should open the tomb and lose the book, we split the key. Here is the other half on a silver chain.

"Something might happen to me and then you should have the key. Wear it always.

"That night we burned the castle and fled. Your grandmother and uncles Hugo and Anatol were in it and were made into ashes. So we fooled the Master in this generation, and if he can find us, he may still take one from among us five.

"But, because of that cat in the mist, I hate and dread all cats, fear them as I do, for they are the allies of the Master and he is patient and tireless in pursuit of his revenge."

THE three sought their beds of hay in the shed which was their common abode. The boy and the dwarf slept in the loft, but the elder Gunnar from bravado always slept below, near the cats, whose least motion in the night caused him to stir uneasily.

The night passed without event, and with the first rays of light the boy awakened to find the dwarf shaking his shoulder and muttering, "Up, up with the sun, lad, no food for sleepy folk!"

Yawning, the boy dropped through the hole in the floor, to the hay below.

The elder Gunnar still slept, and without waking him, the boy eyed his former friend, Tybalt, in a mood of awe, and not offering his accustomed pat he mounted the white horse and rode him to the river for the morning drink and bath.

Though he could not swim, he wallowed about in the shallows. A sharp pain in his foot made him leap, but the pain was forgotten when he groped about in the mud and touched the handle of a small hatchet dropped from a wall above where some workmen had been putting up a scaffolding.

With this treasure tucked in his waistband, after donning his clothes, he rode homeward, eager to show his father.

As he came near the shed, he heard the angry squall of a cat, and then his father's voice in a yell of terror, which choked midway in a gurgle.

He dug his heels into the ribs of the horse and they thundered into the shed.

The first thing that he noticed was that the cage was empty; the second, that a mass of varicolored fur swayed and shook near by. Then the air seemed to be full of cats, as Gunnar plunged forward upon his face, streaming red through his rags, and the cats that had been hurled away sprang in again.

The boy felt a wet hand on his leg, a hand that felt like claws. Guillame, the dwarf, had laid hold upon him and the fingers of both hands seemed sharper than common and were bloody as well.

And as a beginning of the truth made itself manifest to the horrified boy, Guillame burst into his customary harsh titter.

"Faith then!" he cackled; "here's a laugh and a joke for many a day. The first organist to be killed by his organ! Laugh, boy, laugh!"

The horse snorted in terror at the dwarf and backed away. A hateful change

was beginning to make itself apparent both to the animal and the boy on his back. Surely the wrists of the dwarf were growing thinner, the hands smaller and more hairy; the nails were claws, the ears had become pointed, the head looked like that of a wolf, and the whole body was quivering in the throes of metamorphosis.

Suddenly the boy understood.

"The Master! *Loup-garou!*" he shouted. "Taste iron, murderer!" and struck at the ugly head with the hatchet.

Yammering, the dwarf went down, twitching and foaming at his shapeless mouth, just as the horse, wild-eyed and panic-stricken, stampeded through the door of the shed.

But over the Master's body, as he fell, the boy saw a dreadful sight. It was this horror, damnable in its significance, that remained always with him. At the other end of the shed, in solemn parade, marched the twenty cats, a single line of tortured animals that already were bounding, one by one, over the mangled corpse!

Sick at heart, longing for a clean death, he rode for the river Senne. On the bank the horse roamed free as, without a backward glance, Theophide walked waist-deep into the water.

As he commended his soul to God and crossed his breast, he felt the key beneath his shirt and the thought came to him that somewhere was the book of hideous story, that told of the Master and his defeat.

Perhaps if he had the book, he too could defeat the monster, but how to get it? The book was in France, the other half of the key in Scotland.

Then a thought. He would live, he would work and save and scrape. He would go to Scotland, find his uncle Theobald and get the key!

He left the water, captured the horse again and set out away from the city, riding blindly anywhere.

Vengeance was his only thought and vengeance he was certain would be his.

2. Haul Haul Huguenots!

THE roofs of the old wooden houses were a wilderness of gutters and crooked gables, of warped and leaning chimneys, of rotting beams and decayed towers.

Flat in a gutter and hidden by a bush that grew among the debris there, a ragged man lay, peering down three stories into a Parisian street called Love Lane.

All around, there sounded the rattle of drums and the dry hacking cough of intermittent shots, while above, the sky was red with morning and mounting flames.

The air was full of the clash and din of the tocsin and the flood of sounds which poured from every tower and steeple.

It was August, 1572, and the day was that of the blessed St. Bartholomew.

There was, however, no spirit of praise or sympathy or worship in Love Lane. Instead it echoed with shrieks and curses and prayers cut short. A band of furious men, composed partly of archers of the guard and partly of the rabble of the city, had entered its upper end some minutes before.

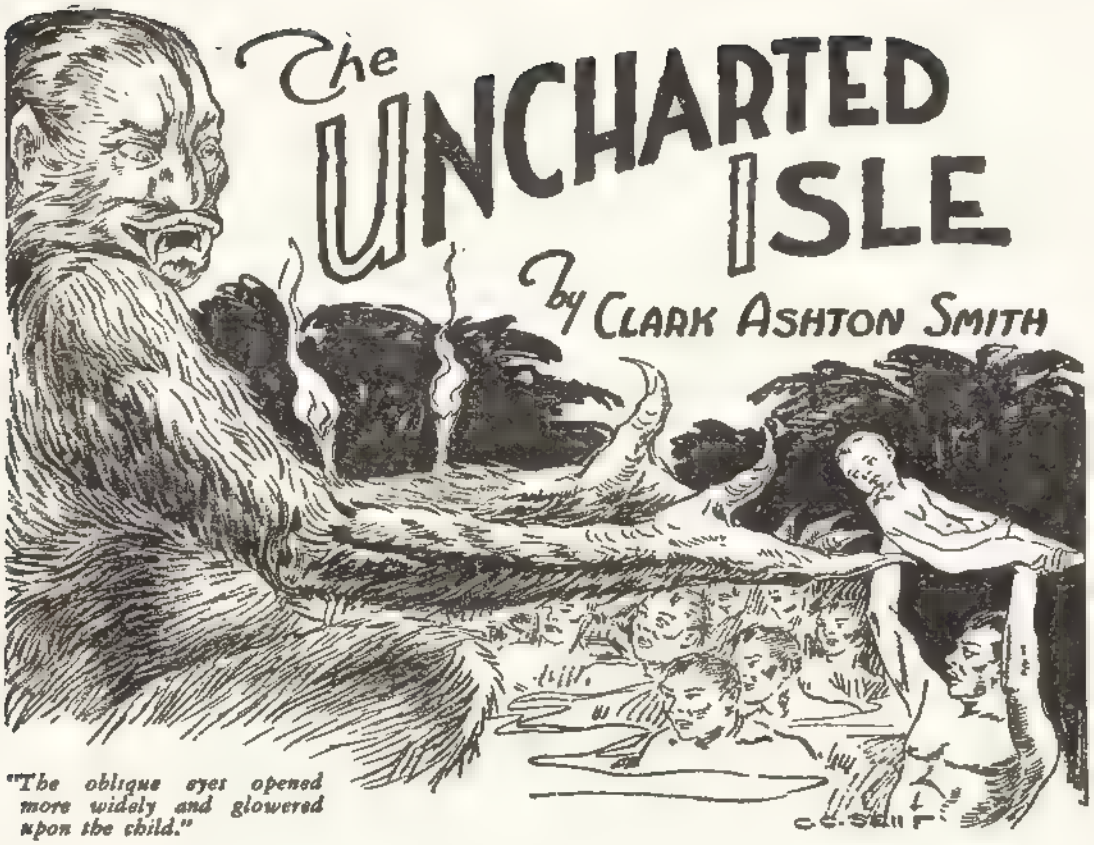
Theophide Gunnar, now a man of thirty-five, forewarned and seeing the futility of resistance, had fled with his arquebus to the roof-tops, and one spot being as safe as another, had waited there for nightfall.

There were times, as he waited, when he condemned himself for deserting the faith of his fathers for that of the Huguenots, but as often as he thought of this,

(*Continued on page 715*)

The UNCHARTED ISLE

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH



"The oblique eyes opened more widely and glowered upon the child."

I DO not know how long I had been drifting in the boat. There are several days and nights that I remember only as alternate blanks of grayness and darkness; and, after these, there came a fantasmagoric eternity of delirium and an indeterminate lapse into pitch-black oblivion. The sea-water I had swallowed must have revived me; for when I came to myself, I was lying at the bottom of the boat with my head a little lifted in the stern, and six inches of brine lapping at my lips. I was gasping and strangling with the mouthfuls I had taken; the boat was tossing roughly, with more water coming over the sides at each toss; and I could hear the sound of breakers not far away.

I tried to sit up, and succeeded, after a prodigious effort. My thoughts and sensations were curiously confused, and I found it difficult to orient myself in any manner. The physical sensation of extreme thirst was dominant over all else—my mouth was lined with running, throbbing fire—and I felt light-headed, and the rest of my body was strangely limp and hollow. It was hard to remember just what had happened; and, for a moment, I was not even puzzled by the fact that I was alone in the boat. But, even to my dazed, uncertain senses, the roar of those breakers had conveyed a distinct warning of peril; and, sitting up, I reached for the oars.

The oars were gone; but, in my enfeebled state, it was not likely that I could have made much use of them anyway. I looked around, and saw that the boat was drifting rapidly in the wash of a shoreward current, between two low-lying darkish reefs half hidden by flying veils of foam. A steep and barren cliff loomed before me; but, as the boat neared it, the cliff seemed to divide miraculously, revealing a narrow chasm through which

I floated into the mirror-like waters of a still lagoon. The passage from the rough sea without, to a realm of sheltered silence and seclusion, was no less abrupt than the transition of events or scenery which often occurs in a dream.

The lagoon was long and narrow, and ran sinuously away between level shores that were fringed with an ultra-tropical vegetation. There were many fern-palms, of a type I had never seen, and many stiff, gigantic cycads, and wide-leaved grasses taller than young trees. I wondered a little about them even then; though, as the boat drifted slowly toward the nearest beach, I was mainly preoccupied with the clarifying and assorting of my recollections. These gave me more trouble than one would think.

I must have been a trifle light-headed still; and the sea-water I had drunk couldn't have been very good for me, either, even though it had helped to revive me. I remembered, of course, that I was Mark Irwin, first mate of the freighter *Auckland,* plying between Lima and Wellington; and I recalled only too well the night when Captain Melville had wrenched me bodily from my bunk, from the dreamless under-sea of a dog-tired slumber, shouting that the ship was on fire. I recalled the roaring hell of flame and smoke through which we had fought our way to the deck, to find that the vessel was already past retrieving, since the fire had reached the oil that formed part of her cargo; and then the swift launching of boats in the lurid glare of the conflagration. Half the crew had been caught in the blazing forecastle; and those of us who escaped were compelled to put off without water or provisions. We had rowed for days in a dead calm, without sighting any vessel, and were suffering the tortures of the damned, when a storm had arisen. In this storm, two of the boats were lost; and the third, which was manned by Captain Melville, the second mate, the boatswain and myself, had alone survived. But some time during the storm, or during the days and nights of delirium that followed, my companions must have gone overboard. . . . This much I recalled; but all of it was somehow unreal and remote, and seemed to pertain only to another person than the one who was floating shoreward on the waters of a still lagoon. I felt very dreamy and detached; and even my thirst didn't trouble me half as much now as it had on awakening.

The boat touched a beach of fine, pearly sand, before I began to wonder where I was and to speculate concerning the shores I had reached. I knew that we had been hundreds of miles southwest of Easter Island on the night of the fire, in a part of the Pacific where there is no other land; and certainly this couldn't be Easter Island. What, then, could it be? I realized with a sort of shock that I must have found something not on any charted course or geological map. Of course, it was an isle of some kind; but I could form no idea of its possible extent; and I had no way of deciding offhand whether it was peopled or unpeopled. Except for the lush vegetation, and a few queer-looking birds and butterflies, and some equally queer-looking fish in the lagoon, there was no visible life anywhere.

I GOT out of the boat, feeling very weak and wobbly in the hot white sunshine that poured down upon everything like a motionless universal cataract. My first thought was to find fresh water; and I plunged at random among the mighty fern-trees, parting their enormous leaves with extreme effort, and sometimes reeling against their boles to save myself from falling. Twenty or thirty paces,

however, and then I came to a tiny rill that sprang in shattered crystal from a low ledge, to collect in a placid pool when ten-inch mosses and broad, anemone-like blossoms mirrored themselves. The water was cool and sweet: I drank profoundly, and felt the benison of its freshness permeate all my parched tissues.

Now I began to look around for some sort of edible fruit. Close to the stream, I found a shrub that was trailing its burden of salmon-yellow drupes on the giant mosses. I couldn't identify the fruit; but its aspect was delicious, and I decided to take a chance. It was full of a sugary pulp; and strength returned to me even as I ate. My brain cleared, and I recovered many, if not all, of the faculties that had been in a state of partial abeyance.

I went back to the boat, and bailed out all the sea-water; then I tried to drag the boat as far up on the sand as I could, in case I might need it again at any future time. My strength was inadequate to the task; and still fearing that the tide might carry it away, I cut some of the high grasses with my clasp-knife and wove them into a long rope, with which I moored the boat to the nearest palm-tree.

Now, for the first time, I surveyed my situation with an analytic eye, and became aware of much that I had hitherto failed to observe or realize. A medley of queer impressions thronged upon me, some of which could not have arrived through the avenues of the known senses. To begin with, I saw more clearly the abnormal oddity of the plant-forms about me: they were not the palm-ferns, grasses and shrubs that are native to south-sea islands: their leaves, their stems, their frondage, were mainly of uncouth archaic types, such as might have existed in former eons, on the sea-lost littorals of Mu. They differed from anything I had seen in Australia or New Guinea, those asylums of a primeval flora; and, gazing upon them, I was overwhelmed with intimations of a dark and prehistoric antiquity. And the silence around me seemed to become the silence of dead ages and of things that have gone down beneath oblivion's tide. From that moment, I felt that there was something wrong about the island. But somehow I couldn't tell just what it was, or seize definitely upon everything that contributed to this impression.

Aside from the bizarre-looking vegetation, I noticed that there was a queerness about the very sun. It was too high in the heavens for any latitude to which I could conceivably have drifted; and it was too large anyway; and the sky was unnaturally bright, with a dazzling incandescence. There was a spell of perpetual quietude upon the air, and never the slightest rippling of leaves or water; and the whole landscape hung before me like a monstrous vision of unbelievable realms apart from time and space. According to all the maps, that island couldn't exist, anyhow. . . . More and more decisively, I knew that there was something wrong: I felt an eery confusion, a weird bewilderment, like one who has been cast away on the shores of an alien planet; and it seemed to me that I was separated from my former life, and from everything I had ever known, by an interval of distance more irremeable than all the blue leagues of sea and sky; that, like the island itself, I was lost to all possible reorientation. For a few instants, this feeling became a nervous panic, a paralyzing horror.

In an effort to overcome my agitation, I set off along the shore of the lagoon, pacing with feverish rapidity. It occurred to me that I might as well explore the island; and perhaps, after all, I might

find some clue to the mystery, might stumble on something of explanation or reassurance.

After several serpent-like turns of the winding water, I reached the end of the lagoon. Here the country began to slope upward toward a high ridge, heavily wooded with the same vegetation I had already met, to which a long-leaved araucaria was now added. This ridge was apparently the crest of the island; and, after a half-hour of groping among the ferns, the stiff archaic shrubs and araucarias, I managed to surmount it.

Here, through a rift in the foliage, I looked down upon a scene no less incredible than unexpected. The farther shore of the island was visible below me; and all along the curving beach of a land-locked harbor were the stone roofs and towers of a town! Even at that distance, I could see that the architecture was of an unfamiliar type; and I was not sure at first glance whether the buildings were ancient ruins or the homes of a living people. Then, beyond the roofs, I saw that several strange-looking vessels were moored at a sort of mole, flaunting their orange sails in the sunlight.

My excitement was indescribable: at most (if the island were peopled at all) I had thought to find a few savage huts; and here below me were edifices that betokened a considerable degree of civilization! What they were, or who had builded them, were problems beyond surmise; but, as I hastened down the slope toward the harbor, a very human eagerness was mingled with the dumfoundment and stupefaction I had been experiencing. At least, there were people on the island; and, at the realization of this, the horror that had been a part of my bewilderment was dissipated for the nonce.

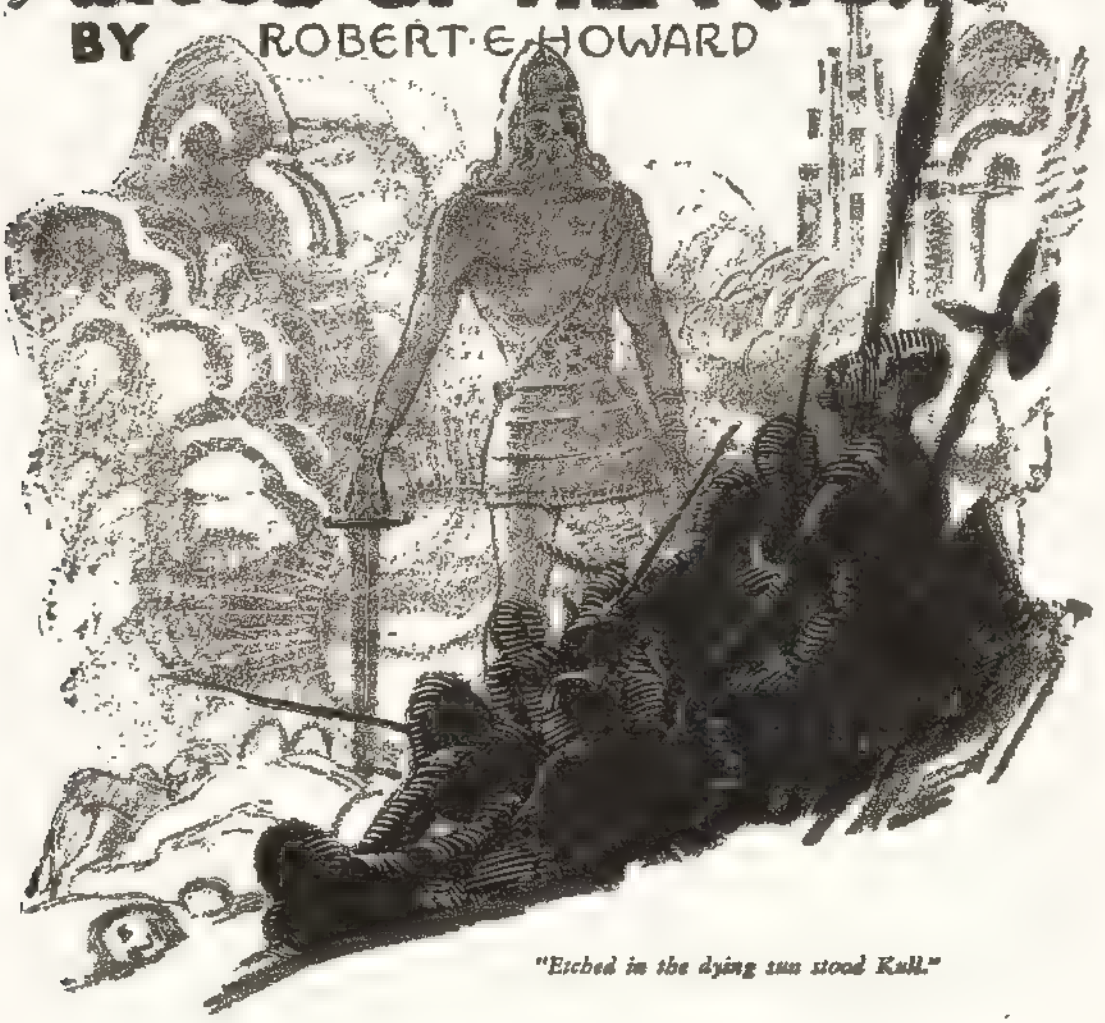
When I drew nearer to the houses, I saw that they were indeed strange. But the strangeness was not wholly inherent in their architectural forms; nor was I able to trace its every source, or define it in any way, by word or image. The houses were built of a stone whose precise color I can not recall, since it was neither brown nor red nor gray, but a hue that seemed to combine, yet differ from, all these; and I remember only that the general type of construction was low and square, with square towers. The strangeness lay in more than this—in the sense of a remote and stupefying antiquity that emanated from them like an odor: I knew at once that they were old as the uncouth primordial trees and grasses, and, like these, were parcel of a long-forgotten world.

Then I saw the people—those people before whom not only my ethnic knowledge, but my very reason, were to own themselves baffled. There were scores of them in sight among the buildings, and all of them appeared to be intensely preoccupied with something or other. At first I couldn't make out what they were doing, or trying to do; but plainly they were very much in earnest about it. Some were looking at the sea or the sun, and then at long scrolls of a paper-like material which they held in their hands; and many were grouped on a stone platform around a large, intricate metal apparatus resembling an armillary. All of these people were dressed in tunic-like garments of unusual amber and azure and Tyrian shades, cut in a fashion that was unfamiliar to history; and when I came close, I saw that their faces were broad and flat, with a vague foreomening of the Mongolian in their oblique eyes. But, in an unspecifiable way, the character of their features was not that of any race that has seen the sun for a million years; and

(Continued on page 710)

KINGS·OF·THE·NIGHT

BY ROBERT·E·HOWARD



"Etched in the dying sun stood Kull."

The Caesar lolled on his ivory throne—
His iron legions came
To break a king in a land unknown,
And a race without a name.
—*The Song of Bran*

THE dagger flashed downward. A sharp cry broke in a gasp. The form on the rough altar twitched convulsively and lay still. The jagged flint edge sawed at the crimsoned breast, and thin bony fingers, ghastly dyed, tore out the still twitching heart. Under matted white brows, sharp eyes gleamed with a ferocious intensity.

Besides the slayer, four men stood about the crude pile of stones that formed the altar of the God of Shadows. One was of medium height, lithely built, scantily clad, whose black hair was confined by a narrow iron band in the center of which gleamed a single red jewel. Of the others, two were dark like the first. But where he was lithe, they were stocky and misshapen, with knotted limbs, and tangled hair falling over sloping brows. His face denoted intelligence and implacable will; theirs merely a beast-like ferocity. The fourth man had little in

common with the rest. Nearly a head taller, though his hair was black as theirs, his skin was comparatively light and he was gray-eyed. He eyed the proceedings with little favor.

And, in truth, Cormac of Connacht was little at ease. The Druids of his own isle of Erin had strange dark rites of worship, but nothing like this. Dark trees shut in this grim scene, lit by a single torch. Through the branches moaned an eery night-wind. Cormac was alone among men of a strange race and he had just seen the heart of a man ripped from his still pulsing body. Now the ancient priest, who looked scarcely human, was glaring at the throbbing thing. Cormac shuddered, glancing at him who wore the jewel. Did Bran Mak Morn, king of the Picts, believe that this white-bearded old butcher could foretell events by scanning a bleeding human heart? The dark eyes of the king were inscrutable. There were strange depths to the man that Cormac could not fathom, nor any other man.

"The portents are good!" exclaimed the priest wildly, speaking more to the two chieftains than to Bran. "Here from the pulsing heart of a captive Roman I read—defeat for the arms of Rome! Triumph for the sons of the heather!"

The two savages murmured beneath their breath, their fierce eyes smoldering.

"Go and prepare your clans for battle," said the king, and they lumbered away with the ape-like gait assumed by such stunted giants. Paying no more heed to the priest who was examining the ghastly ruin on the altar, Bran beckoned to Cormac. The Gael followed him with alacrity. Once out of that grim grove, under the starlight, he breathed more freely. They stood on an eminence, looking out over long swelling undulations of gently waving heather. Near at hand a few fires twinkled, their fewness giving scant evidence of the hordes of tribesmen who lay close by. Beyond these were more fires and beyond these still more, which last marked the camp of Cormac's own men, hard-riding, hard-fighting Gaels, who were of that band which was just beginning to get a foothold on the western coast of Caledonia—the nucleus of what was later to become the kingdom of Dalriadia. To the left of these, other fires gleamed.

And far away to the south were more fires—mere pinpoints of light. But even at that distance the Pictish king and his Celtic ally could see that these fires were laid out in regular order.

"The fires of the legions," muttered Bran. "The fires that have lit a path around the world. The men who light those fires have trampled the races under their iron heels. And now—we of the heather have our backs at the wall. What will fall on the morrow?"

"Victory for us, says the priest," answered Cormac.

Bran made an impatient gesture. "Moonlight on the ocean. Wind in the fir tops. Do you think that I put faith in such mummery? Or that I enjoyed the butchery of a captive legionary? I must hearten my people; it was for Gron and Bocah that I let old Gonar read the portents. The warriors will fight better."

"And Gonar?"

Bran laughed. "Gonar is too old to believe—anything. He was high priest of the Shadows a score of years before I was born. He claims direct descent from that Gonar who was a wizard in the days of Brule, the Spear-slayer who was the first of my line. No man knows how old he is—sometimes I think he is the original Gonar himself!"

"At least," said a mocking voice, and

Cormac started as a dim shape appeared at his side, "at least I have learned that in order to keep the faith and trust of the people, a wise man must appear to be a fool. I know secrets that would blast even your brain, Bran, should I speak them. But in order that the people may believe in me, I must descend to such things as they think proper magic—and prance and yell and rattle snakeskins, and dabble about in human blood and chicken livers."

Cormac looked at the ancient with new interest. The semi-madness of his appearance had vanished. He was no longer the charlatan, the spell-mumbling shaman. The starlight lent him a dignity which seemed to increase his very height, so that he stood like a white-bearded patriarch.

"Bran, your doubt lies there." The lean arm pointed to the fourth ring of fires.

"Aye," the king nodded gloomily. "Cormac—you know as well as I. Tomorrow's battle hinges upon that circle of fires. With the chariots of the Britons and your own Western horsemen, our success would be certain, but—surely the devil himself is in the heart of every Northman! You know how I trapped that band—how they swore to fight for me against Rome! And now that their chief, Rognar, is dead, they swear that they will be led only by a king of their own race! Else they will break their vow and go over to the Romans. Without them we are doomed, for we can not change our former plan."

"Take heart, Bran," said Gonar. "Touch the jewel in your iron crown. Mayhap it will bring you aid."

Bran laughed bitterly. "Now you talk as the people think. I am no fool to twist with empty words. What of the gem? It is a strange one, truth, and has brought me luck ere now. But I need now, no jewels; but the allegiance of three hundred fickle Northmen who are the only warriors among us who may stand the charge of the legions on foot."

"But the jewel, Bran, the jewel!" persisted Gonar.

"Well, the jewel!" cried Bran impatiently. "It is older than this world. It was old when Atlantis and Lemuria sank into the sea. It was given to Brule, the Spear-slayer, first of my line, by the Atlantean Kull, king of Valusia, in the days when the world was young. But shall that profit us now?"

"Who knows?" asked the wizard obliquely. "Time and space exist not. There was no past, and there shall be no future. NOW is all. All things that ever were, are, or ever will be, transpire *now*. Man is forever at the center of what we call time and space. I have gone into yesterday and tomorrow and both were as real as today—which is like the dreams of ghosts! But let me sleep and talk with Gonar. Mayhap he shall aid us."

"What means he?" asked Cormac, with a slight twitching of his shoulders, as the priest strode away in the shadows.

"He has ever said that the first Gonar comes to him in his dreams and talks with him," answered Bran. "I have seen him perform deeds that seemed beyond human ken. I know not. I am but an unknown king with an iron crown, trying to lift a race of savages out of the slime into which they have sunk. Let us look to the camps."

AS THEY walked Cormac wondered. By what strange freak of fate had such a man risen among this race of savages, survivors of a darker, grimmer age? Surely he was an atavism, an original type of the days when the Picts ruled all Europe, before their primitive empire fell before the

bronze swords of the Gauls. Cormac knew how Bran, rising by his own efforts from the negligent position of the son of a Wolf clan chief, had to an extent united the tribes of the heather and now claimed kingship over all Caledon. But his rule was loose and much remained before the Pictish clans would forget their feuds and present a solid front to foreign foes. On the battle of the morrow, the first pitched battle between the Picts under their king and the Romans, hinged the future of the rising Pictish kingdom.

Bran and his ally walked through the Pictish camp where the swart warriors lay sprawled about their small fires, sleeping or gnawing half-cooked food. Cormac was impressed by their silence. A thousand men camped here, yet the only sounds were occasional low guttural intonations. The silence of the Stone Age rested in the souls of these men.

They were all short — most of them crooked of limb. Giant dwarfs; Bran Mak Morn was a tall man among them. Only the older men were bearded and they scantily, but their black hair fell about their eyes so that they peered fiercely from under the tangle. They were barefoot and clad scantily in wolfskins. Their arms consisted in short barbed swords of iron, heavy black bows, arrows tipped with flint, iron and copper, and stone-headed mallets. Defensive armor they had none, save for a crude shield of hide-covered wood; many had worked bits of metal into their tangled manes as a slight protection against sword-cuts. Some few, sons of long lines of chiefs, were smooth-limbed and lithe like Bran, but in the eyes of all gleamed the unquenchable savagery of the primeval.

These men are fully savages, thought Cormac, worse than the Gauls, Britons and Germans. Can the old legends be true—that they reigned in a day when strange cities rose where now the sea rolls? And that they survived the flood that washed those gleaming empires under, sinking again into that savagery from which they once had risen?

Close to the encampment of the tribesmen were the fires of a group of Britons —members of fierce tribes who lived south of the Roman Wall but who dwelt in the hills and forests to the west and defied the power of Rome. Powerfully built men they were, with blazing blue eyes and shocks of tousled yellow hair, such men as had thronged the Ceanntish beaches when Cæsar brought the Eagles into the Isles. These men, like the Picts, wore no armor, and were clad scantily in coarse-worked cloth and deerskin sandals. They bore small round bucklers of hard wood, braced with bronze, to be worn on the left arm, and long heavy bronze swords with blunt points. Some had bows, though the Britons were indifferent archers. Their bows were shorter than the Picts' and effective only at close range. But ranged close by their fires were the weapons that had made the name Briton a word of terror to Pict, Roman and Norse raider alike. Within the circle of firelight stood fifty bronze chariots with long cruel blades curving out from the sides. One of these blades could dismember half a dozen men at once. Tethered close by under the vigilant eyes of their guards grazed the chariot horses — big, rangy steeds, swift and powerful.

"Would that we had more of them!" mused Bran. "With a thousand chariots and my bowmen I could drive the legions into the sea."

"The free British tribes must eventually fall before Rome," said Cormac. "It would seem they would rush to join you in your war."

Bran made a helpless gesture. "The

fickleness of the Celt. They can not forget old feuds. Our ancient men have told us how they would not even unite against Cæsar when the Romans first came. They will not make head against a common foe together. These men came to me because of some dispute with their chief, but I can not depend on them when they are not actually fighting."

Cormac nodded. "I know; Cæsar conquered Gaul by playing one tribe against another. My own people shift and change with the waxing and waning of the tides. But of all Celts, the Cymry are the most changeable, the least stable. Not many centuries ago my own Gaelic ancestors wrested Erin from the Cymric Danaans, because though they outnumbered us, they opposed us as separate tribes, rather than as a nation."

"And so these Cymric Britons face Rome," said Bran. "These will aid us on the morrow. Further I can not say. But how shall I expect loyalty from alien tribes, who am not sure of my own people? Thousands lurk in the hills, holding aloof. I am king in name only. Let me win tomorrow and they will flock to my standard; if I lose, they will scatter like birds before a cold wind."

A CHORUS of rough welcome greeted the two leaders as they entered the camp of Cormac's Gaels. Five hundred in number they were, tall rangy men, black-haired and gray-eyed mainly, with the bearing of men who lived by war alone. While there was nothing like close discipline among them, there was an air of more system and practical order than existed in the lines of the Picts and Britons. These men were of the last Celtic race to invade the Isles and their barbaric civilization was of much higher order than that of their Cymric kin. The ancestors of the Gaels had learned the arts of war on the vast plains of Scythia and at the courts of the Pharaohs where they had fought as mercenaries of Egypt, and much of what they learned they brought into Ireland with them. Excelling in metal work, they were armed, not with clumsy bronze swords, but with high-grade weapons of iron.

They were clad in well-woven kilts and leathern sandals. Each wore a light shirt of chain mail and a vizorless helmet, but this was all of their defensive armor. Celts, Gaelic or Brythonic, were prone to judge a man's valor by the amount of armor he wore. The Britons who faced Cæsar deemed the Romans cowards because they cased themselves in metal, and many centuries later the Irish clans thought the same of the mail-clad Norman knights of Strongbow.

Cormac's warriors were horsemen. They neither knew nor esteemed the use of the bow. They bore the inevitable round, metal-braced buckler, dirks, long straight swords and light single-handed axes. Their tethered horses grazed not far away—big-boned animals, not so ponderous as those raised by the Britons, but swifter.

Bran's eyes lighted as the two strode through the camp. "These men are keen-beaked birds of war! See how they whet their axes and jest of the morrow! Would that the raiders in yon camp were as staunch as your men, Cormac! Then would I greet the legions with a laugh when they come up from the south tomorrow."

They were entering the circle of the Northmen fires. Three hundred men sat about gambling, whetting their weapons and drinking deep of the heather ale furnished them by their Pictish allies. These gazed upon Bran and Cormac with no great friendliness. It was striking to note the difference between them and the Picts

and Celts—the difference in their cold eyes, their strong moody faces, their very bearing. Here was ferocity, and savagery, but not of the wild, upbursting fury of the Celt. Here was fierceness backed by grim determination and stolid stubbornness. The charge of the British clans was terrible, overwhelming. But they had no patience; let them be balked of immediate victory and they were likely to lose heart and scatter or fall to bickering among themselves. There was the patience of the cold blue North in these seafarers—a lasting determination that would keep them stedfast to the bitter end, once their face was set toward a definite goal.

As to personal stature, they were giants; massive yet rangy. That they did not share the ideas of the Celts regarding armor was shown by the fact that they were clad in heavy scale mail shirts that reached below mid-thigh, heavy horned helmets and hardened hide leggings, reinforced, as were their shoes, with plates of iron. Their shields were huge oval affairs of hard wood, hide and brass. As to weapons, they had long iron-headed spears, heavy iron axes, and daggers. Some had long wide-bladed swords.

Cormac scarcely felt at ease with the cold magnetic eyes of these flaxen-haired men fixed upon him. He and they were hereditary foes, even though they did chance to be fighting on the same side at present—but were they?

A man came forward, a tall gaunt warrior on whose scarred, wolfish face the flickering firelight reflected deep shadows. With his wolfskin mantle flung carelessly about his wide shoulders, and the great horns on his helmet adding to his height, he stood there in the swaying shadows, like some half-human thing, a brooding shape of the dark barbarism that was soon to engulf the world.

"Well, Wulfhere," said the Pictish king, "you have drunk the mead of council and have spoken about the fires—what is your decision?"

The Northman's eyes flashed in the gloom. "Give us a king of our own race to follow if you wish us to fight for you."

Bran flung out his hands. "Ask me to drag down the stars to gem your helmets? Will not your comrades follow you?"

"Not against the legions," answered Wulfhere sullenly. "A king led us on the viking path—a king must lead us against the Romans. And Rognar is dead."

"I am a king," said Bran. "Will you fight for me if I stand at the tip of your fight wedge?"

"A king of our own race," said Wulfhere doggedly. "We are all picked men of the North. We fight for none but a king, and a king must lead us—against the legions."

Cormac sensed a subtle threat in this repeated phrase.

"Here is a prince of Erin," said Bran. "Will you fight for the Westerner?"

"We fight under no Celt, West or East," growled the viking, and a low rumble of approval rose from the onlookers. "It is enough to fight by their side."

The hot Gaelic blood rose in Cormac's brain and he pushed past Bran, his hand on his sword. "How mean you that, pirate?"

Before Wulfhere could reply Bran interposed: "Have done! Will you fools throw away the battle before it is fought, by your madness? What of your oath, Wulfhere?"

"We swore it under Rognar; when he died from a Roman arrow we were absolved of it. We will follow only a king—against the legions."

"But your comrades will follow you—against the heather people!" snapped Bran.

"Aye," the Northman's eyes met his brazenly. "Send us a king or we join the Romans tomorrow."

Bran snarled. In his rage he dominated the scene, dwarfing the huge men who towered over him.

"Traitors! Liars! I hold your lives in my hand! Aye, draw your swords if you will—Cormac, keep your blade in its sheath. These wolves will not bite a king! Wulfhere—I spared your lives when I could have taken them.

"You came to raid the countries of the South, sweeping down from the northern sea in your galleys. You ravaged the coasts and the smoke of burning villages hung like a cloud over the shores of Caledon. I trapped you all when you were pillaging and burning—with the blood of my people on your hands. I burned your long ships and ambushed you when you followed. With thrice your number of bowmen who burned for your lives hidden in the heathered hills about you, I spared you when we could have shot you down like trapped wolves. Because I spared you, you swore to come and fight for me."

"And shall we die because the Picts fight Rome?" rumbled a bearded raider.

"Your lives are forfeit to me; you came to ravage the South. I did not promise to send you all back to your homes in the North unharmed and loaded with loot. Your vow was to fight one battle against Rome under my standard. Then I will aid your survivors to build ships and you may go where you will, with a goodly share of the plunder we take from the legions. Rognar had kept his oath. But Rognar died in a skirmish with Roman scouts and now you, Wulfhere the Dissension-breeder, you stir up your comrades to dishonor themselves by that which a Northman hates—the breaking of the sworn word."

"We break no oath," snarled the viking, and the king sensed the basic Germanic stubbornness, far harder to combat than the fickleness of the fiery Celts. "Give us a king, neither Pict, Gael nor Briton, and we will die for you. If not—then we will fight tomorrow for the greatest of all kings—the emperor of Rome!"

FOR a moment Cormac thought that the Pictish king, in his black rage, would draw and strike the Northman dead. The concentrated fury that blazed in Bran's dark eyes caused Wulfhere to recoil and drop a hand to his belt.

"Fool!" said Mak Morn in a low voice that vibrated with passion. "I could sweep you from the earth before the Romans are near enough to hear your death howls. Choose—fight for me on the morrow—or die tonight under a black cloud of arrows, a red storm of swords, a dark wave of chariots!"

At the mention of the chariots, the only arm of war that had ever broken the Norse shield-wall, Wulfhere changed expression, but he held his ground.

"War be it," he said doggedly. "Or a king to lead us!"

The Northmen responded with a short deep roar and a clash of swords on shields. Bran, eyes blazing, was about to speak again when a white shape glided silently into the ring of firelight.

"Soft words, soft words," said old Gonar tranquilly. "King, say no more. Wulfhere, you and your fellows will fight for us if you have a king to lead you?"

"We have sworn."

"Then be at ease," quoth the wizard; "for ere battle joins on the morrow I will send you such a king as no man on earth has followed for a hundred thousand years! A king neither Pict, Gael nor Brit-

on, but one to whom the emperor of Rome is as but a village headman!"

While they stood undecided, Gonar took the arms of Cormac and Bran. "Come. And you, Northmen, remember your vow, and my promise which I have never broken. Sleep now, nor think to steal away in the darkness to the Roman camp, for if you escaped our shafts you would not escape either my curse or the suspicions of the legionaries."

So the three walked away and Cormac, looking back, saw Wulfhere standing by the fire, fingering his golden beard, with a look of puzzled anger on his lean evil face.

THE three walked silently through the waving heather under the far-away stars while the weird night wind whispered ghostly secrets about them.

"Ages ago," said the wizard suddenly, "in the days when the world was young, great lands rose where now the ocean roars. On these lands thronged mighty nations and kingdoms. Greatest of all these was Valusia—Land of Enchantment. Rome is as a village compared to the splendor of the cities of Valusia. And the greatest king was Kull, who came from the land of Atlantis to wrest the crown of Valusia from a degenerate dynasty. The Picts who dwelt in the isles which now form the mountain peaks of a strange land upon the Western Ocean, were allies of Valusia, and the greatest of all the Pictish war-chiefs was Brule the Spear-slayer, first of the line men call Mak Morn.

"Kull gave to Brule the jewel which you now wear in your iron crown, oh king, after a strange battle in a dim land, and down the long ages it has come to us, ever a sign of the Mak Morn, a symbol of former greatness. When at last the sea rose and swallowed Valusia, Atlantis and Lemuria, only the Picts survived and they were scattered and few. Yet they began again the slow climb upward, and though many of the arts of civilization were lost in the great flood, yet they progressed. The art of metal-working was lost, so they excelled in the working of flint. And they ruled all the new lands flung up by the sea and now called Europe, until down from the north came younger tribes who had scarce risen from the ape when Valusia reigned in her glory, and who, dwelling in the icy lands about the Pole, knew naught of the lost splendor of the Seven Empires and little of the flood that had swept away half a world.

"And still they have come—Aryans, Celts, Germans, swarming down from the great cradle of their race which lies near the Pole. So again was the growth of the Pictish nation checked and the race hurled into savagery. Erased from the earth, on the fringe of the world with our backs to the wall we fight. Here in Caledon is the last stand of a once mighty race. And we change. Our people have mixed with the savages of an elder age which we drove into the North when we came into the Isles, and now, save for their chieftains, such as thou, Bran, a Pict is strange and abhorrent to look upon."

"True, true," said the king impatiently, "but what has that to do——"

"Kull, king of Valusia," said the wizard imperturbably, "was a barbarian in his age as thou art in thine, though he ruled a mighty empire by the weight of his sword. Gonar, friend of Brule, your first ancestor, has been dead a hundred thousand years as we reckon time. Yet I talked with him a scant hour agone."

"You talked with his ghost——"

"Or he with mine? Did I go back a hundred thousand years, or did he come forward? If he came to me out of the past, it is not I who talked with a dead man, but he who talked with a man un-

born. Past, present and future are one to a wise man. I talked to Gonar while he was alive; likewise was I alive. In a timeless, spaceless land we met and he told me many things."

The land was growing light with the birth of dawn. The heather waved and bent in long rows before the dawn wind as bowing in worship of the rising sun.

"The jewel in your crown is a magnet that draws down the eons," said Gonar. "The sun is rising—and who comes out of the sunrise?"

Cormac and the king started. The sun was just lifting a red orb above the eastern hills. And full in the glow, etched boldly against the golden rim, a man suddenly appeared. They had not seen him come. Against the golden birth of day he loomed colossal; a gigantic god from the dawn of creation. Now as he strode toward them the waking hosts saw him and sent up a sudden shout of wonder.

"Who—or what is it?" exclaimed Bran.

"Let us go to meet him, Bran," answered the wizard. "He is the king Gonar has sent to save the people of Brule."

2

"I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule;
From a wild weird clime that lieth sublime
Out of Space—out of Time."

—Poe.

THE army fell silent as Bran, Cormac and Gonar went toward the stranger who approached in long swinging strides. As they neared him the illusion of monstrous size vanished, but they saw he was a man of great stature. At first Cormac thought him to be a Northman but a second glance told him that nowhere before had he seen such a man. He was built much like the vikings, at once massive and lithe—tigerish. But his features were not as theirs, and his square-cut, lion-like mane of hair was as black as Bran's own. Under heavy brows glittered eyes gray as steel and cold as ice. His bronzed face, strong and inscrutable, was clean-shaven, and the broad forehead betokened a high intelligence, just as the firm jaw and thin lips showed will-power and courage. But more than all, the bearing of him, the unconscious lion-like stateliness, marked him as a natural king, a ruler of men.

Sandals of curious make were on his feet and he wore a pliant coat of strangely meshed mail which came almost to his knees. A broad belt with a great golden buckle encircled his waist, supporting a long straight sword in a heavy leather scabbard. His hair was confined by a wide, heavy golden band about his head.

Such was the man who paused before the silent group. He seemed slightly puzzled, slightly amused. Recognition flickered in his eyes. He spoke in a strange archaic Pictish which Cormac scarcely understood. His voice was deep and resonant.

"Ha, Brule, Gonar did not tell me I would dream of you!"

For the first time in his life Cormac saw the Pictish king completely thrown off his balance. He gaped, speechless. The stranger continued:

"And wearing the gem I gave you, in a circlet on your head! Last night you wore it in a ring on your finger."

"Last night?" gasped Bran.

"Last night or a hundred thousand years ago—all one!" murmured Gonar in evident enjoyment of the situation.

"I am not Brule," said Bran. "Are you mad to thus speak of a man dead a hundred thousand years? He was first of my line."

The stranger laughed unexpectedly. "Well, now I know I am dreaming! This will be a tale to tell Brule when I waken

on the morrow! That I went into the future and saw men claiming descent from the Spear-slayer who is, as yet, not even married. No, you are not Brule, I see now, though you have his eyes and his bearing. But he is taller and broader in the shoulders. Yet you have his jewel—oh, well—anything can happen in a dream, so I will not quarrel with you. For a time I thought I had been transported to some other land in my sleep, and was in reality awake in a strange country, for this is the clearest dream I ever dreamed. Who are you?"

"I am Bran Mak Morn, king of the Caledonian Picts. And this ancient is Gonar, a wizard, of the line of Gonar. And this warrior is Cormac na Connacht, a prince of the isle of Erin."

The stranger slowly shook his lion-like head. "These words sound strangely to me, save Gonar—and that one is not Gonar, though he too is old. What land is this?"

"Caledon, or Alba, as the Gaels call it."

"And who are those squat ape-like warriors who watch us yonder, all agape?"

"They are the Picts who own my rule."

"How strangely distorted folk are in dreams!" muttered the stranger. "And who are those shock-headed men about the chariots?"

"They are Britons—Cymry from south of the Wall."

"What Wall?"

"The Wall built by Rome to keep the people of the heather out of Britain."

"Britain?" the tone was curious. "I never heard of that land—and what is Rome?"

"What!" cried Bran. "You never heard of Rome, the empire that rules the world?"

"No empire rules the world," answered the other haughtily. "The mightiest kingdom on earth is that wherein I reign."

"And who are you?"

"Kull of Atlantis, king of Valusia!"

Cormac felt a coldness trickle down his spine. The cold gray eyes were unswerving—but this was incredible—monstrous—unnatural.

"Valusia!" cried Bran. "Why, man, the sea waves have rolled above the spires of Valusia for untold centuries!"

Kull laughed outright. "What a mad nightmare this is! When Gonar put on me the spell of deep sleep last night—or this night!—in the secret room of the inner palace, he told me I would dream strange things, but this is more fantastic than I reckoned. And the strangest thing is, I know I am dreaming!"

Gonar interposed as Bran would have spoken. "Question not the acts of the gods," muttered the wizard. "You are king because in the past you have seen and seized opportunities. The gods or the first Gonar have sent you this man. Let me deal with him."

Bran nodded, and while the silent army gaped in speechless wonder, just within ear-shot, Gonar spoke: "Oh great king, you dream, but is not all life a dream? How reckon you but that your former life is but a dream from which you have just awakened? Now we dream-folk have our wars and our peace, and just now a great host comes up from the south to destroy the people of Brule. Will you aid us?"

Kull grinned with pure zest. "Aye! I have fought battles in dreams ere now, have slain and been slain and was amazed when I woke from my visions. And at times, as now, dreaming I have known I dreamed. See, I pinch myself and feel it, but I know I dream for I have felt the pain of fierce wounds, in dreams. Yes,

people of my dream, I will fight for you against the other dream-folk. Where are they?"

"And that you enjoy the dream more," said the wizard subtly, "forget that it is a dream and pretend that by the magic of the first Gonar, and the quality of the jewel you gave Brule, that now gleams on the crown of the Morni, you have in truth been transported forward into another, wilder age where the people of Brule fight for their life against a stronger foe."

For a moment the man who called himself king of Valusia seemed startled; a strange look of doubt, almost of fear, clouded his eyes. Then he laughed.

"Good! Lead on, wizard."

But now Bran took charge. He had recovered himself and was at ease. Whether he thought, like Cormac, that this was all a gigantic hoax arranged by Gonar, he showed no sign.

"King Kull, see you those men yonder who lean on their long-shafted axes as they gaze upon you?"

"The tall men with the golden hair and beards?"

"Aye—our success in the coming battle hinges on them. They swear to go over to the enemy if we give them not a king to lead them—their own having been slain. Will you lead them to battle?"

Kull's eyes glowed with appreciation. "They are men such as my own Red Slayers, my picked regiment. I will lead them."

"Come then."

THE small group made their way down the slope, through throngs of warriors who pushed forward eagerly to get a better view of the stranger, then pressed back as he approached. An undercurrent of tense whispering ran through the horde.

The Northmen stood apart in a compact group. Their cold eyes took in Kull and he gave back their stares, taking in every detail of their appearance.

"Wulfhere," said Bran, "we have brought you a king. I hold you to your oath."

"Let him speak to us," said the viking harshly.

"He can not speak your tongue," answered Bran, knowing that the Northmen knew nothing of the legends of his race. "He is a great king of the South——"

"He comes out of the past," broke in the wizard calmly. "He was the greatest of all kings, long ago."

"A dead man!" The vikings moved uneasily and the rest of the horde pressed forward, drinking in every word. But Wulfhere scowled: "Shall a ghost lead living men? You bring us a man you say is dead. We will not follow a corpse."

"Wulfhere," said Bran in still passion, "you are a liar and a traitor. You set us this task, thinking it impossible. You yearn to fight under the Eagles of Rome. We have brought you a king neither Pict, Gael nor Briton and you deny your vow!"

"Let him fight me, then!" howled Wulfhere in uncontrollable wrath, swinging his ax about his head in a glittering arc. "If your dead man overcomes me—then my people will follow you. If I overcome him, you shall let us depart in peace to the camp of the legions!"

"Good!" said the wizard. "Do you agree, wolves of the North?"

A fierce yell and a brandishing of swords was the answer. Bran turned to Kull, who had stood silent, understanding nothing of what was said. But the Atlantean's eyes gleamed. Cormac felt that those cold eyes had looked on too many such scenes not to understand something of what had passed.

"This warrior says you must fight him for the leadership," said Bran, and Kull,

eyes glittering with growing battle-joy, nodded: "I guessed as much. Give us space."

"A shield and a helmet!" shouted Bran, but Kull shook his head.

"I need none," he growled. "Back and give us room to swing our steel!"

MEN pressed back on each side, forming a solid ring about the two men, who now approached each other warily. Kull had drawn his sword and the great blade shimmered like a live thing in his hand. Wulfhere, scarred by a hundred savage fights, flung aside his wolfskin mantle and came in cautiously, fierce eyes peering over the the top of his out-thrust shield, ax half lifted in his right hand.

Suddenly when the warriors were still many feet apart Kull sprang. His attack brought a gasp from men used to deeds of prowess; for like a leaping tiger he shot through the air and his sword crashed on the quickly lifted shield. Sparks flew and Wulfhere's ax hacked in, but Kull was under its sweep and as it swished viciously above his head he thrust upward and sprang out again, cat-like. His motions had been too quick for the eye to follow. The upper edge of Wulfhere's shield showed a deep cut, and there was a long rent in his mail shirt where Kull's sword had barely missed the flesh beneath.

Cormac, trembling with the terrible thrill of the fight, wondered at this sword that could thus slice through scale-mail. And the blow that gashed the shield should have shattered the blade. Yet not a notch showed in the Valusian steel! Surely this blade was forged by another people in another age!

Now the two giants leaped again to the attack and like double strokes of lightning their weapons crashed. Wulfhere's shield fell from his arm in two pieces as the Atlantean's sword sheared clear through it, and Kull staggered as the Northman's ax, driven with all the force of his great body, descended on the golden circlet about his head. That blow should have sheared through the gold like butter to split the skull beneath, but the ax rebounded, showing a great notch in the edge. The next instant the Northman was overwhelmed by a whirlwind of steel—a storm of strokes delivered with such swiftness and power that he was borne back as on the crest of a wave, unable to launch an attack of his own. With all his tried skill he sought to parry the singing steel with his ax. But he could only avert his doom for a few seconds; could only for an instant turn the whistling blade that hewed off bits of his mail, so close fell the blows. One of the horns flew from his helmet; then the ax-head itself fell away, and the same blow that severed the handle, bit through the viking's helmet into the scalp beneath. Wulfhere was dashed to his knees, a trickle of blood starting down his face.

Kull checked his second stroke, and tossing his sword to Cormac, faced the dazed Northman weaponless. The Atlantean's eyes were blazing with ferocious joy and he roared something in a strange tongue. Wulfhere gathered his legs under him and bounded up, snarling like a wolf, a dagger flashing into his hand. The watching horde gave tongue in a yell that ripped the skies as the two bodies clashed. Kull's clutching hand missed the Northman's wrist but the desperately lunging dagger snapped on the Atlantean's mail, and dropping the useless hilt, Wulfhere locked his arms about his foe in a bear-like grip that would have crushed the ribs of a lesser man. Kull grinned tigerishly and returned the grapple, and for a moment the two swayed on their feet. Slowly the black-haired war-

rior bent his foe backward until it seemed his spine would snap. With a howl that had nothing of the human in it, Wulfhere clawed frantically at Kull's face, trying to tear out his eyes, then turned his head and snapped his fang-like teeth into the Atlantean's arm. A yell went up as a trickle of blood started: "He bleeds! He bleeds! He is no ghost, after all, but a mortal man!"

Angered, Kull shifted his grip, shoving the frothing Wulfhere away from him, and smote him terrifically under the ear with his right hand. The viking landed on his back a dozen feet away. Then, howling like a wild man, he leaped up with a stone in his hand and flung it. Only Kull's incredible quickness saved his face; as it was, the rough edge of the missile tore his cheek and inflamed him to madness. With a lion-like roar he bounded upon his foe, enveloped him in an irresistible blast of sheer fury, whirled him high above his head as if he were a child and cast him a dozen feet away. Wulfhere pitched on his head and lay still—broken and dead.

Dazed silence reigned for an instant; then from the Gaels went up a thundering roar, and the Britons and Picts took it up, howling like wolves, until the echoes of the shouts and the clangor of sword on shield reached the ears of the marching legionaries, miles to the south.

"Men of the gray North," shouted Bran, "will you hold by your oath *now*?"

The fierce souls of the Northmen were in their eyes as their spokesman answered. Primitive, superstitious, steeped in tribal lore of fighting gods and mythical heroes, they did not doubt that the black-haired fighting man was some supernatural being sent by the fierce gods of battle.

"Aye! Such a man as this we have never seen! Dead man, ghost or devil, we will follow him, whether the trail lead to Rome or Valhalla!"

Kull understood the meaning, if not the words. Taking his sword from Cormac with a word of thanks, he turned to the waiting Northmen and silently held the blade toward them high above his head, in both hands, before he returned it to its scabbard. Without understanding, they appreciated the action. Blood-stained and disheveled, he was an impressive picture of stately, magnificent barbarism.

"Come," said Bran, touching the Atlantean's arm; "a host is marching on us and we have much to do. There is scant time to arrange our forces before they will be upon us. Come to the top of yonder slope."

There the Pict pointed. They were looking down into a valley which ran north and south, widening from a narrow gorge in the north until it debouched upon a plain to the south. The whole valley was less than a mile in length.

"Up this valley will our foes come," said the Pict, "because they have wagons loaded with supplies and on all sides of this vale the ground is too rough for such travel. Here we plan an ambush."

"I would have thought you would have had your men lying in wait long before now," said Kull. "What of the scouts the enemy is sure to send out?"

"The savages I lead would never have waited in ambush so long," said Bran with a touch of bitterness. "I could not post them until I was sure of the Northmen. Even so I had not dared to post them ere now—even yet they may take panic from the drifting of a cloud or the blowing of a leaf, and scatter like birds before a cold wind. King Kull—the fate of the Pictish nation is at stake. I am called king of the Picts, but my rule as yet is but a hollow mockery. The hills are full of wild clans who refuse to fight for me. Of the thousand bowmen now

at my command, more than half are of my own clan.

"Some eighteen hundred Romans are marching against us. It is not a real invasion, but much hinges upon it. It is the beginning of an attempt to extend their boundaries. They plan to build a fortress a day's march to the north of this valley. If they do, they will build other forts, drawing bands of steel about the heart of the free people. If I win this battle and wipe out this army, I will win a double victory. Then the tribes will flock to me and the next invasion will meet a solid wall of resistance. If I lose, the clans will scatter, fleeing into the north until they can no longer flee, fighting as separate clans rather than as one strong nation.

"I have a thousand archers, five hundred horsemen, fifty chariots with their drivers and swordsmen—one hundred fifty men in all—and, thanks to you, three hundred heavily armed Northern pirates. How would you arrange your battle lines?"

"Well," said Kull, "I would have barricaded the north end of the valley—no! That would suggest a trap. But I would block it with a band of desperate men, like those you have given me to lead. Three hundred could hold the gorge for a time against any number. Then, when the enemy was engaged with these men to the narrow part of the valley, I would have my archers shoot down into them until their ranks are broken, from both sides of the vale. Then, having my horsemen concealed behind one ridge and my chariots behind the other, I would charge with both simultaneously and sweep the foe into a red ruin."

Bran's eyes glowed. "Exactly, king of Valusia. Such was my exact plan——"

"But what of the scouts?"

"My warriors are like panthers; they hide under the noses of the Romans. Those who ride into the valley will see only what we wish them to see. Those who ride over the ridge will not come back to report. An arrow is swift and silent.

"You see that the pivot of the whole thing depends on the men that hold the gorge. They must be men who can fight on foot and resist the charges of the heavy legionaries long enough for the trap to close. Outside these Northmen I had no such force of men. My naked warriors with their short swords could never stand such a charge for an instant. Nor is the armor of the Celts made for such work; moreover, they are not foot-fighters, and I need them elsewhere.

"So you see why I had such desperate need of the Northmen. Now will you stand in the gorge with them and hold back the Romans until I can spring the trap? Remember, most of you will die."

Kull smiled. "I have taken chances all my life, though Tu, chief councillor, would say my life belongs to Valusia and I have no right to so risk it——" His voice trailed off and a strange look flitted across his face. "By Valka," said he, laughing uncertainly, "sometimes I forget this is a dream! All seems so real. But it is—of course it is! Well, then, if I die I will but awaken as I have done in times past. Lead on, king of Caledon!"

Cormac, going to his warriors, wondered. Surely it was all a hoax; yet—he heard the arguments of the warriors all about him as they armed themselves and prepared to take their posts. The black-haired king was Neid himself, the Celtic war-god; he was an antediluvian king brought out of the past by Gonar; he was a mythical fighting man out of Valhalla. He was no man at all but a ghost! No, he was mortal, for he had bled. But the gods themselves bled, though they did not die. So the controversies raged. At least, thought Cormac, if it was all a hoax

to inspire the warriors with the feeling of supernatural aid, it had succeeded. The belief that Kull was more than a mortal man had fired Celt, Pict and viking alike into a sort of inspired madness. And Cormac asked himself—what did he himself believe? This man was surely one from some far land—yet in his every look and action there was a vague hint of a greater difference than mere distance of space—a hint of alien Time, of misty abysses and gigantic gulfs of eons lying between the black-haired stranger and the men with whom he walked and talked. Clouds of bewilderment mazed Cormac's brain and he laughed in whimsical self-mockery.

3

"And the two wild peoples of the north
Stood fronting in the gloam,
And heard and knew each in his mind
A third great sound upon the wind,
The living walls that hedge mankind,
The walking walls of Rome."
—Chesterton.

THE sun slanted westward. Silence lay like an invisible mist over the valley. Cormac gathered the reins in his hand and glanced up at the ridges on both sides. The waving heather which grew rank on those steep slopes gave no evidence of the hundreds of savage warriors who lurked there. Here in the narrow gorge which widened gradually southward was the only sign of life. Between the steep walls three hundred Northmen were massed solidly in their wedge-shaped shield-wall, blocking the pass. At the tip, like the point of a spear, stood the man who called himself Kull, king of Valusia. He wore no helmet, only the great, strangely worked head-band of hard gold, but he bore on his left arm the great shield borne by the dead Rognar; and in his right hand he held the heavy iron mace wielded by the sea-king. The vikings eyed him in wonder and savage admiration. They could not understand his language, or he theirs. But no further orders were necessary. At Bran's directions they had bunched themselves in the gorge, and their only order was—hold the pass!

Bran Mak Morn stood just in front of Kull. So they faced each other, he whose kingdom was yet unborn, and he whose kingdom had been lost in the mists of Time for unguessed ages. Kings of darkness, thought Cormac, nameless kings of the night, whose realms are gulfs and shadows.

The hand of the Pictish king went out. "King Kull, you are more than king—you are a man. Both of us may fall within the next hour—but if we both live, ask what you will of me."

Kull smiled, returning the firm grip. "You too are a man after my own heart, king of the shadows. Surely you are more than a figment of my sleeping imagination. Mayhap we will meet in waking life some day."

Bran shook his head in puzzlement, swung into the saddle and rode away, climbing the eastern slope and vanishing over the ridge. Cormac hesitated: "Strange man, are you in truth of flesh and blood, or are you a ghost?"

"When we dream, we are all flesh and blood—so long as we are dreaming," Kull answered. "This is the strangest nightmare I have ever known—but you, who will soon fade into sheer nothingness as I awaken, seem as real to me *now*, as Brule, or Kananu, or Tu, or Kelkor."

Cormac shook his head as Bran had done, and with a last salute, which Kull returned with barbaric stateliness, he turned and trotted away. At the top of the western ridge he paused. Away to the south a light cloud of dust rose and the head of the marching column was in sight. Already he believed he could feel

the earth vibrate slightly to the measured tread of a thousand mailed feet beating in perfect unison. He dismounted, and one of his chieftains, Domnail, took his steed and led it down the slope away from the valley, where trees grew thickly. Only an occasional vague movement among them gave evidence of the five hundred men who stood there, each at his horse's head with a ready hand to check a chance nicker.

Oh, thought Cormac, the gods themselves made this valley for Bran's ambush! The floor of the valley was treeless and the inner slopes were bare save for the waist-high heather. But at the foot of each ridge on the side facing away from the vale, where the soil long washed from the rocky slopes had accumulated, there grew enough trees to hide five hundred horsemen or fifty chariots.

At the northern end of the valley stood Kull and his three hundred vikings, in open view, flanked on each side by fifty Pictish bowmen. Hidden on the western side of the western ridge were the Gaels. Along the top of the slopes, concealed in the tall heather, lay a hundred Picts with their shafts on string. The rest of the Picts were hidden on the eastern slopes beyond which lay the Britons with their chariots in full readiness. Neither they nor the Gaels to the west could see what went on in the vale, but signals had been arranged.

Now the long column was entering the wide mouth of the valley and their scouts, light-armed men on swift horses, were spreading out between the slopes. They galloped almost within bowshot of the silent host that blocked the pass, then halted. Some whirled and raced back to the main force, while the others deployed and cantered up the slopes, seeking to see what lay beyond. This was the crucial moment. If they got any hint of the ambush, all was lost. Cormac, shrinking down into the heather, marveled at the ability of the Picts to efface themselves from view so completely. He saw a horseman pass within three feet of where he knew a bowman lay, yet the Roman saw nothing.

The scouts topped the ridges, gazed about; then most of them turned and trotted back down the slopes. Cormac wondered at their desultory manner of scouting. He had never fought Romans before, knew nothing of their arrogant self-confidence, of their incredible shrewdness in some ways, their incredible stupidity in others. These men were overconfident; a feeling radiating from their officers. It had been years since a force of Caledonians had stood before the legions. And most of these men were but newly come to Britain; part of a legion which had been quartered in Egypt. They despised their foes and suspected nothing.

But stay—three riders on the opposite ridge had turned and vanished on the other side. And now one, sitting his steed at the crest of the western ridge, not a hundred yards from where Cormac lay, looked long and narrowly down into the mass of trees at the foot of the slope. Cormac saw suspicion grow on his brown, hawk-like face. He half turned as though to call to his comrades, then instead reined his steed down the slope, leaning forward in his saddle. Cormac's heart pounded. Each moment he expected to see the man wheel and gallop back to raise the alarm. He resisted a mad impulse to leap up and charge the Roman on foot. Surely the man could feel the tenseness in the air—the hundreds of fierce eyes upon him. Now he was halfway down the slope, out of sight of the men in the valley. And now the twang of an unseen bow broke the painful stillness. With a strangled gasp the Roman flung his hands high, and as the steed reared, he pitched headlong, transfixed

by a long black arrow that had flashed from the heather. A stocky dwarf sprang out of nowhere, seemingly, and seized the bridle, quieting the snorting horse, and leading it down the slope. At the fall of the Roman, short crooked men rose like a sudden flight of birds from the grass and Cormac saw the flash of a knife. Then with unreal suddenness all had subsided. Slayers and slain were unseen and only the still waving heather marked the grim deed.

THE Gael looked back into the valley. The three who had ridden over the eastern ridge had not come back and Cormac knew they never would. Evidently the other scouts had borne word that only a small band of warriors were ready to dispute the passage of the legionaries. Now the head of the column was almost below him and he thrilled at the sight of these men who were doomed, swinging along with their superb arrogance. And the sight of their splendid armor, their hawk-like faces and perfect discipline awed him as much as it is possible for a Gael to be awed.

Twelve hundred men in heavy armor who marched as one so that the ground shook to their tread! Most of them were of middle height, with powerful chests and shoulders and bronzed faces—hard-bitten veterans of a hundred campaigns. Cormac noted their javelins, short keen swords and heavy shields; their gleaming armor and crested helmets, the eagles on the standards. These were the men beneath whose tread the world had shaken and empires crumbled! Not all were Latins; there were Romanized Britons among them and one century or hundred was composed of huge yellow-haired men —Gauls and Germans, who fought for Rome as fiercely as did the native-born, and hated their wilder kinsmen more savagely.

On each side was a swarm of cavalry, outriders, and the column was flanked by archers and slingers. A number of lumbering wagons carried the supplies of the army. Cormac saw the commander riding in his place—a tall man with a lean, imperious face, evident even at that distance. Marcus Sulius—the Gael knew him by repute.

A deep-throated roar rose from the legionaries as they approached their foes. Evidently they intended to slice their way through and continue without a pause, for the column moved implacably on. Whom the gods destroy they first make mad—Cormac had never heard the phrase but it came to him that the great Sulius was a fool. Roman arrogance! Marcus was used to lashing the cringing peoples of a decadent East; little he guessed of the iron in these western races.

A group of cavalry detached itself and raced into the mouth of the gorge, but it was only a gesture. With loud jeering shouts they wheeled three spears length away and cast their javelins, which rattled harmlessly on the overlapping shields of the silent Northmen. But their leader dared too much; swinging in, he leaned from his saddle and thrust at Kull's face. The great shield turned the lance and Kull struck back as a snake strikes; the ponderous mace crushed helmet and head like an eggshell, and the very steed went to its knees from the shock of that terrible blow. From the Northmen went up a short fierce roar, and the Picts beside them howled exultantly and loosed their arrows among the retreating horsemen. First blood for the people of the heather! The oncoming Romans shouted vengefully and quickened their pace as the frightened horse raced by, a ghastly travesty of a man, foot caught in the stirrup, trailing beneath the pounding hoofs.

Now the first line of the legionaries, compressed because of the narrowness of

the gorge, crashed against the solid wall of shields—crashed and recoiled upon itself. The shield-wall had not shaken an inch. This was the first time the Roman legions had met with that unbreakable formation—that oldest of all Aryan battle-lines—the ancestor of the Spartan regiment—the Theban phalanx—the Macedonian formation—the English square.

Shield crashed on shield and the short Roman sword sought for an opening in that iron wall. Viking spears bristling in solid ranks above, thrust and reddened; heavy axes chopped down, shearing through iron, flesh and bone. Cormac saw Kull, looming above the stocky Romans in the forefront of the fray, dealing blows like thunderbolts. A burly centurion rushed in, shield held high, stabbing upward. The iron mace crashed terribly, shivering the sword, rending the shield apart, shattering the helmet, crushing the skull down between the shoulders —in a single blow.

The front line of the Romans bent like a steel bar about the wedge, as the legionaries sought to struggle through the gorge on each side and surround their opposers. But the pass was too narrow; crouching close against the steep walls the Picts drove their black arrows in a hail of death. At this range the heavy shafts tore through shield and corselet, transfixing the armored men. The front line of battle rolled back, red and broken, and the Northmen trod their few dead under foot to close the gaps their fall had made. Stretched the full width of their front lay a thin line of shattered forms—the red spray of the tide which had broken upon them in vain.

Cormac had leaped to his feet, waving his arms. Domnail and his men broke cover at the signal and came galloping up the slope, lining the ridge. Cormac mounted the horse brought him and glanced impatiently across the narrow vale. No sign of life appeared on the eastern ridge. Where was Bran—and the Britons?

Down in the valley, the legions, angered at the unexpected opposition of the paltry force in front of them, but not suspicious, were forming in more compact body. The wagons which had halted were lumbering on again and the whole column was once more in motion as if it intended to crash through by sheer weight. With the Gaulish century in the forefront, the legionaries were advancing again in the attack. This time, with the full force of twelve hundred men behind, the charge would batter down the resistance of Kull's warriors like a heavy ram; would stamp them down, sweep over their red ruins. Cormac's men trembled in impatience. Suddenly Marcus Sulius turned and gazed westward, where the line of horsemen was etched against the sky. Even at that distance Cormac saw his face pale. The Roman at last realized the metal of the men he faced, and that he had walked into a trap. Surely in that moment there flashed a chaotic picture through his brain —defeat—disgrace—red ruin!

It was too late to retreat—too late to form into a defensive square with the wagons for barricade. There was but one way possible out, and Marcus, crafty general in spite of his recent blunder, took it. Cormac heard his voice cut like a clarion through the din, and though he did not understand the words, he knew that the Roman was shouting for his men to smite that knot of Northmen like a blast—to hack their way through and out of the trap before it could close!

Now the legionaries, aware of their desperate plight, flung themselves headlong and terribly on their foes. The shield-wall rocked, but it gave not an inch. The wild faces of the Gauls and the hard brown Italian faces glared over locked shields into the blazing eyes of the

North. Shields touching, they smote and slew and died in a red storm of slaughter, where crimsoned axes rose and fell and dripping spears broke on notched swords.

Where in God's name was Bran with his chariots? A few minutes more would spell the doom of every man who held that pass. Already they were falling fast, though they locked their ranks closer and held like iron. Those wild men of the North were dying in their tracks; and looming among their golden heads the black lion-mane of Kull shone like a symbol of slaughter, and his reddened mace showered a ghastly rain as it splashed brains and blood like water.

Something snapped in Cormac's brain.

"These men will die while we wait for Bran's signal!" he shouted. "On! Follow me into Hell, sons of Gael!"

A wild roar answered him, and loosing rein he shot down the slope with five hundred yelling riders plunging headlong after him. And even at that moment a storm of arrows swept the valley from either side like a dark cloud and the terrible clamor of the Picts split the skies. And over the eastern ridge, like a sudden burst of rolling thunder on Judgment Day, rushed the war-chariots. Headlong down the slope they roared, foam flying from the horses' distended nostrils, frantic feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground, making naught of the tall heather. In the foremost chariot, with his dark eyes blazing, crouched Bran Mak Morn, and in all of them the naked Britons were screaming and lashing as if possessed by demons. Behind the flying chariots came the Picts, howling like wolves and loosing their arrows as they ran. The heather belched them forth from all sides in a dark wave.

So much Cormac saw in chaotic glimpses during that wild ride down the slopes. A wave of cavalry swept between him and the main line of the column. Three long leaps ahead of his men, the Gaelic prince met the spears of the Roman riders. The first lance turned on his buckler, and rising in his stirrups he smote downward, cleaving his man from shoulder to breastbone. The next Roman flung a javelin that killed Domnail, but at that instant Cormac's steed crashed into his, breast to breast, and the lighter horse rolled headlong under the shock, flinging his rider beneath the pounding hoofs.

Then the whole blast of the Gaelic charge smote the Roman cavalry, shattering it, crashing and rolling it down and under. Over its red ruins Cormac's yelling demons struck the heavy Roman infantry, and the whole line reeled at the shock. Swords and axes flashed up and down and the force of their rush carried them deep into the massed ranks. Here, checked, they swayed and strove. Javelins thrust, swords flashed upward, bringing down horse and rider, and greatly outnumbered, leaguered on every side, the Gaels had perished among their foes, but at that instant, from the other side the crashing chariots smote the Roman ranks. In one long line they struck almost simultaneously, and at the moment of impact the charioteers wheeled their horses sidelong and raced parallel down the ranks, shearing men down like the mowing of wheat. Hundreds died on those curving blades in that moment, and leaping from the chariots, screaming like blood-mad wildcats, the British swordsmen flung themselves upon the spears of the legionaries, hacking madly with their two-handed swords. Crouching, the Picts drove their arrows pointblank and then sprang in to slash and thrust. Maddened with the sight of victory, these wild peoples were like wounded tigers, feeling no wounds, and dying on their feet with their last gasp a snarl of fury.

But the battle was not over yet. Dazed, shattered, their formation broken and

nearly half their number down already, the Romans fought back with desperate fury. Hemmed in on all sides they slashed and smote singly, or in small clumps, fought back to back, archers, slingers, horsemen and heavy legionaries mingled into a chaotic mass. The confusion was complete, but not the victory. Those bottled in the gorge still hurled themselves upon the red axes that barred their way, while the massed and serried battle thundered behind them. From one side Cormac's Gaels raged and slashed; from the other chariots swept back and forth, retiring and returning like iron whirlwinds. There was no retreat, for the Picts had flung a cordon across the way they had come, and having cut the throats of the camp followers and possessed themselves of the wagon, they sent their shafts in a storm of death into the rear of the shattered column. Those long black arrows pierced armor and bone, nailing men together. Yet the slaughter was not all on one side. Picts died beneath the lightning thrust of javelin and shortsword, Gaels pinned beneath their falling horses were hewed to pieces, and chariots, cut loose from their horses, were deluged with the blood of the charioteers.

And at the narrow head of the valley still the battle surged and eddied. Great gods—thought Cormac, glancing between lightning-like blows—do these men still hold the gorge? Aye! They held it! A tenth of their original number, dying on their feet, they still held back the frantic charges of the dwindling legionaries.

OVER all the field went up the roar and the clash of arms, and birds of prey, swift-flying out of the sunset, circled above. Cormac, striving to reach Marcus Sulius through the press, saw the Roman's horse sink under him, and the rider rise alone in a waste of foes. He saw the Roman sword flash thrice, dealing a death at each blow; then from the thickest of the fray bounded a terrible figure. It was Bran Mak Morn, stained from head to foot. He cast away his broken sword as he ran, drawing a dirk. The Roman struck, but the Pictish king was under the thrust, and gripping the sword-wrist, he drove the dirk again and again through the gleaming armor.

A mighty roar went up as Marcus died, and Cormac, with a shout, rallied the remnants of his force about him and, striking in the spurs, burst through the shattered lines and rode full speed for the other end of the valley.

But as he approached he saw that he was too late. As they had lived, so had they died, those fierce sea-wolves, with their faces to the foe and their broken weapons red in their hands. In a grim and silent band they lay, even in death preserving some of the shield-wall formation. Among them, in front of them and all about them lay high-heaped the bodies of those who had sought to break them, in vain. *They had not given back a foot!* To the last man, they had died in their tracks. Nor were there any left to stride over their torn shapes; those Romans who had escaped the viking axes had been struck down by the shafts of the Picts and swords of the Gaels from behind.

Yet this part of the battle was not over. High up on the steep western slope Cormac saw the ending of that drama. A group of Gauls in the armor of Rome pressed upon a single man — a black-haired giant on whose head gleamed a golden crown. There was iron in these men, as well as in the man who had held them to their fate. They were doomed—their comrades were being slaughtered behind them — but before their turn came they would at least have the life of the black-haired chief who had led the golden-haired men of the North.

Pressing upon him from three sides they had forced him slowly back up the steep gorge wall, and the crumpled bodies that stretched along his retreat showed how fiercely every foot of the way had been contested. Here on this steep it was task enough to keep one's footing alone; yet these men at once climbed and fought. Kull's shield and the huge mace were gone, and the great sword in his right hand was dyed crimson. His mail, wrought with a forgotten art, now hung in shreds, and blood streamed from a hundred wounds on limbs, head and body. But his eyes still blazed with the battle-joy and his wearied arm still drove the mighty blade in strokes of death.

But Cormac saw that the end would come before they could reach him. Now at the very crest of the steep, a hedge of points menaced the strange king's life, and even his iron strength was ebbing. Now he split the skull of a huge warrior and the back-stroke shore through the neck-cords of another; reeling under a very rain of swords he struck again and his victim dropped at his feet, cleft to the breast-bone. Then, even as a dozen swords rose above the staggering Atlantean for the death stroke, a strange thing happened. The sun was sinking into the western sea; all the heather swam red like an ocean of blood. Etched in the dying sun, as he had first appeared, Kull stood, and then, like a mist lifting, a mighty vista opened behind the reeling king. Cormac's astounded eyes caught a fleeting gigantic glimpse of other climes and spheres—as if mirrored in summer clouds he saw, instead of the heather hills stretching away to the sea, a dim and mighty land of blue mountains and gleaming quiet lakes—the golden, purple and sapphirean spires and towering walls of a mighty city such as the earth has not known for many a drifting age.

Then like the fading of a mirage it was gone, but the Gauls on the high slope had dropped their weapons and stared like men dazed—*For the man called Kull had vanished and there was no trace of his going!*

As IN a daze Cormac turned his steed and rode back across the trampled field. His horse's hoofs splashed in lakes of blood and clanged against the helmets of dead men. Across the valley the shout of victory was thundering. Yet all seemed shadowy and strange. A shape was striding across the torn corpses and Cormac was dully aware that it was Bran. The Gael swung from his horse and fronted the king. Bran was weaponless and gory; blood trickled from gashes on brow, breast and limb; what armor he had worn was clean hacked away and a cut had shorn half-way through his iron crown. But the red jewel still gleamed unblemished like a star of slaughter.

"It is in my mind to slay you," said the Gael heavily and like a man speaking in a daze, "for the blood of brave men is on your head. Had you given the signal to charge sooner, some would have lived."

Bran folded his arms; his eyes were haunted. "Strike if you will; I am sick of slaughter. It is a cold mead, this kinging it. A king must gamble with men's lives and naked swords. The lives of all my people were at stake; I sacrificed the Northmen — yes; and my heart is sore within me, for they were men! But had I given the order when you would have desired, all might have gone awry. The Romans were not yet massed in the narrow mouth of the gorge, and might have had time and space to form their ranks again and beat us off. I waited until the last moment—and the rovers died. A king belongs to his people, and can not let either his own feelings or the lives of men influence him. Now my people

are saved; but my heart is cold in my breast."

Cormac wearily dropped his sword-point to the ground.

"You are a born king of men, Bran," said the Gaelic prince.

Bran's eyes roved the field. A mist of blood hovered over all, where the victorious barbarians were looting the dead, while those Romans who had escaped slaughter by throwing down their swords and now stood under guard, looked on with hot smoldering eyes.

"My kingdom — my people — are saved," said Bran wearily. "They will come from the heather by the thousands and when Rome moves against us again, she will meet a solid nation. But I am weary. What of Kull?"

"My eyes and brain were mazed with battle," answered Cormac. "I thought to see him vanish like a ghost into the sunset. I will seek his body."

"Seek not for him," said Bran. "Out of the sunrise he came—into the sunset he has gone. Out of the mists of the ages he came to us, and back into the mists of the eons has he returned—to his own kingdom."

Cormac turned away; night was gathering. Gonar stood like a white specter before him.

"To his own kingdom," echoed the wizard. "Time and Space are naught. Kull has returned to his own kingdom—his own crown—his own age."

"Then he was a ghost?"

"Did you not feel the grip of his solid hand? Did you not hear his voice—see him eat and drink, laugh and slay and bleed?"

Still Cormac stood like one in a trance.

"Then if it be possible for a man to pass from one age into one yet unborn, or come forth from a century dead and forgotten, whichever you will, with his flesh-and-blood body and his arms—then he is as mortal as he was in his own day. Is Kull dead, then?"

"He died a hundred thousand years ago, as men reckon time," answered the wizard, "but in his own age. He died not from the swords of the Gauls of this age. Have we not heard in legends how the king of Valusia traveled into a strange, timeless land of the misty future ages, and there fought in a great battle? Why, so he did! A hundred thousand years ago, or today!

"And a hundred thousand years ago—or a moment agone!—Kull, king of Valusia, roused himself on the silken couch in his secret chamber and laughing, spoke to the first Gonar, saying: 'Ha, wizard, I have in truth dreamed strangely, for I went into a far clime and a far time in my visions, and fought for the king of a strange shadow-people!' And the great sorcerer smiled and pointed silently at the red, notched sword, and the torn mail and the many wounds that the king carried. And Kull, fully woken from his 'vision' and feeling the sting and the weakness of these yet bleeding wounds, fell silent and mazed, and all life and time and space seemed like a dream of ghosts to him, and he wondered thereat all the rest of his life. For the wisdom of the Eternities is denied even unto princes and Kull could no more understand what Gonar told him than you can understand my words."

"And then Kull lived despite his many wounds," said Cormac, "and has returned to the mists of silence and the centuries. Well — he thought us a dream; we thought him a ghost. And sure, life is but a web spun of ghosts and dreams and illusion, and it is in my mind that the kingdom which has this day been born of swords and slaughter in this howling valley is a thing no more solid than the foam of the bright sea."

The COSMIC CLOUD

by EDMOND HAMILTON

"A voice whispered tensely in his ear in the tongue of the galaxy."

WE THREE stared at the Chief across the metal desk for a moment before I broke the silence.

"But it's incredible!" I exclaimed. "You must be mistaken, sir—nothing in the galaxy could cause a thing like that!"

Jhul Din and Korus Kan nodded in agreement beside me, but the Chief of the Interstellar Patrol shook his head.

"Yet something in the galaxy *is* causing it, Dur Nal," he said. "I tell you that this thing has taken thousands of interstellar ships in the last few days without giving us any clue to its cause!"

Slowly I shook my head. "I don't doubt what you say, sir," I told him, "but it seems impossible."

The four of us were sitting in a small metal-walled room through whose window came the red light of mighty Betelgeuse, the sun upon one of whose planets we were. The room was part of the Betelgeuse headquarters of the Interstellar Patrol, and to it but hours before from the great central headquarters at Canopus had come Lacq Larus, Chief of the Patrol. His first act had been to summon our cruiser, which had been patrolling off Betelgeuse, and he sat considering us now, a great plant-man of Capella whose strange green fibrous body was tense and whose green-pupiled eyes were unmoving as he faced us.

Jhul Din and Korus Kan and I sat across the desk from him. Jhul Din was of Spica, a big powerful crustacean-man, his strong body armored in black shell, his quick eyes protruding. Korus Kan, of Antares, was typical of that star's races, his upright man-like body being of metal, with lens-like eyes, a tireless body-machine in which his living brain was cased. I, earth-man, completed the trio,

and though the members of the Interstellar Patrol are from every peopled sun no stranger three in appearance could have been found in it.

Lacq Larus had been looking thoughtfully out of the window across the teeming world of Betelgeusans outside, but turned and again faced us. "I will explain to you the whole situation," he said, "for it's imperative that you three understand it.

"As you know, our galaxy is a great swarm of suns floating in the vast gulf of space, each with its own worlds and peoples. All, of course, are ruled by the Federation of Suns, and all are policed by our own Interstellar Patrol. Back and forth between these suns has gone the galaxy's interstellar commerce for ages, countless thousands of great space-ships plying from sun to sun without hindrance. But now at last this great commerce of the galaxy is threatened with disaster!

"That threat lies in what we have always known as the cosmic cloud, a vast cloud of utter darkness that lies, as you know, near the galaxy's center. It has always lain there, a tremendous area of utter blackness billions of miles in extent, and of it our scientists have been able to say with certainty only that it is a tremendous region where the light-vibrations are simply non-existent.

"More than that none could say, for no ship can venture into that region without plunging into absolute lightlessness, so that none knows what may lie inside. It is true that some years ago one of the galaxy's scientists, Zat Zanat by name, ventured into the cloud to explore it in a ship with some assistants, having some new theory concerning it which he wished to test. But this scientist, one of the scientists of the sun of Deneb, never emerged from it and without doubt met death in it as many luckless ships in the past have done.

"None other has ever desired to penetrate into the great cloud and the galaxy's interstellar ships have always routed their course far around it, to escape the danger. But suddenly, a few days ago, hundreds of ships passing near the great cloud in space were drawn abruptly into it by some titanic and irresistible force. Their calls for help came to our distance-phones and a score of cruisers of the Patrol were rushed to the cloud's edge to investigate. But they found that the unfortunate swarms of ships had vanished inside it by them, their calls ceasing soon after, and there was no trace of what force had whirled them in!

"Instantly warnings were broadcast to all interstellar ships to avoid the neighborhood of the cloud. The cruisers of the Patrol then reconnoitered completely around it for more than a day, finding nothing unusual. At last we were convinced that it was some great ether-disturbance that had whirled the luckless ships inside, and orders were given that the space-lanes around the cloud were again safe. Yet the interstellar traffic had been streaming around it for no more than a few hours when the thing was repeated, and more than a thousand other great ships were drawn with terrific power and swiftness into the great blackness.

"Again all traffic around the cloud was suspended and again a squadron of Interstellar Patrol cruisers flashed to the scene. But they found nothing more this time, no sign of what had caused the great disaster. For two days we waited, though, but the cruisers there reported all as usual. So with some misgivings we yielded to the clamor from the galaxy's suns and allowed the ships again to route their course around the great blackness. A day passed without mishap and we began to

breathe easier. And then the thing struck again, and again, but hours ago, more than a thousand ships with all inside them were whirled into the great cloud's darkness.

"This third disaster has caused something like a panic across the galaxy. All realize now that interstellar traffic around the cloud must be suspended until the thing is cleared up, and since the cloud lies almost at the galaxy's center that means the crippling of our interstellar commerce. Always, in time of great peril, the galaxy's peoples have turned to the Interstellar Patrol to save them. They are turning to us now to bring an end to this great threat, and we of the Patrol must not fail them."

Lacq Larus halted for a moment and as he did so the three of us were on our feet.

"When do we start for the cloud, sir?" asked Jhul Din quietly.

The Chief smiled. "You have guessed it," he said. "I have summoned you here to Betelgeuse, have come here from Canopus to meet you because it is on you three that I now rely. You, Dur Nal and Korus Kan and Jhul Din, saved all this galaxy once, when you dared outside our universe to other universes to thwart those who would have loosed death on us.

"I am asking you, therefore, to dare again for the galaxy, to endeavor to find what force it is that has whirled those thousands of ships into the blackness of the cosmic cloud. I dare not send a number of cruisers there, for all may be lost like the others. I do not even give you an order to go, for it means certain death if that force manifests itself again and draws you into the cloud. But if you can explore around its edges you may be able with your recording-instruments to find out what great ether-disturbance or unknown force it is that has caused these terrible calamities, may save the galaxy from greater ones. I say again though that it is not an order. If you, Dur Nal, and your two lieutenants wish to go in your cruiser it is well, but if you do not wish to you need not. What say you?"

He was looking at me fixedly, but my eyes were on the time-dial on my wrist.

"We should reach the cloud's edge within ten hours," was all I said.

MINUTES later our cruiser was slanting up at mounting speed from that swarming world of Betelgeusans, our crew rushing about its throbbing generators and Korus Kan and Jhul Din and I in its pilot room. With Korus Kan at the wheel the long ship rose through the glare of the great crimson sun and threaded through the masses of interstellar shipping until it was speeding through the black gloom of space, with all about us the shining hosts of the galaxy's suns.

Far ahead there stood out against the farther stars what seemed a small black spot in the galaxy's star-swarm. It was, we knew, the colossal cosmic cloud of darkness absolute into which thousands of ships had been drawn to some strange fate, and whose secret, if secret there were, we must discover. With the cruiser's hull quivering slightly and with the generators beneath talking louder we hurtled at thousands of light-speeds across the galaxy toward that lightless region.

Hour upon hour our cruiser flew like a thing of thought through the vast spaces toward the cloud. At the highest speed safe to use inside the galaxy we were traveling, and as we drew nearer the cloud's edge our space-chart showed that no other ships were in space about us now, all avoiding the cloud's strange menace. But our own craft hurtled steadily on, and steadily the vast region of blackness grew greater in the firmament before us.

In the cruiser's instrument room Jhul

Din and I prepared the intricate recording-instruments on which the success of our venture depended. These were mechanisms connected to various indicators outside the hull, which recorded all ether-currents and drifts and disturbances around the ship, all electrical or radioactive or other forces, and all conditions of temperature and pressure.

If it was really some unheard-of and recurring force or some tremendous ether-disturbance that had swept the luckless ships into the cloud, we should be able to determine its nature and source with these aids.

From the instrument room's window Jhul Din and I watched the great cloud largen as we neared it. It seemed soon like a colossal black curtain across the universe, blotting half the galaxy's suns from sight, stretching across billions of miles. What mysteries did that vast and enigmatic region of lightlessness contain?

At last Korus Kan's voice came down through the order-phone from the pilot room. "We're within two million miles of the cloud's edge," he reported. "What orders?"

"Turn right and coast at a hundred light-speeds along its edge," I told him. "Jhul Din and I will start our observations, and I'll let you know when to change course or speed."

He assented briefly, and in the next moment we saw through the window that the gigantic black curtain of the cloud was sliding sidewise as our cruiser turned in space to coast along its edge. At once Jhul Din and I began our work. Bending over the dials of the recording-instruments, the Spican and I made quick readings as the ship moved on.

All ether-conditions outside the cruiser seemed normal, however, with no strong currents or maelstroms anywhere near us. Nor were our other instruments more enlightening, for none registered any unusual force. For more than an hour, while Korus Kan held the cruiser in a steady course along the cloud's edge, we kept to our watch of the dials, but with no greater result.

I turned from the instruments to the window, shaking my head. "I'm afraid it's useless, Jhul Din," I said. "It never was but a slender chance that we might find anything this way, and I'm afraid it has failed."

He looked thoughtfully with me toward the vast black wall of darkness. "Yet it's our one chance to learn anything," he said. "It may be that on the cloud's other side we could discover something."

"We'll have to try it, but I don't place much faith in it," I told him. "Whatever it is about the cloud has caused those——"

With stunning force I was hurled slantwise across the instrument room to strike in one of its corners, Jhul Din flung with me. The next instant saw the room's walls spinning madly around us and rattling us inside them like peas in a box. There were hoarse cries from the generator rooms and a wild uproar through all the cruiser as with awful speed and force it was whirled over and over.

Bruised and half dazed, I retained enough presence of mind to clutch at the rail of the pilot room stair as I was thrown against it, and as Jhul Din was flung past me a moment later I grasped and held his arm. Together we struggled up into the pilot room, where we glimpsed Korus Kan clinging to the wheel-standard as the room gyrated about him.

"The cloud!" he cried. *"It's the force they told us of—it's drawing us into the cloud!"*

"Into the cloud!"

The cold of outside space seemed about us in the fear that for a moment held us,

for as we looked from the windows of the whirling pilot room we saw instantly that the Antarian was right. Our cruiser was hurtling at tremendous speed straight toward the vast region of darkness we had been coasting.

"Turn on full power!" I cried. "Try to bring the ship out of this, Korus Kan!"

"I can't!" he shouted back. "I've got every generator on full but the cruiser doesn't obey its wheel! It's some colossal magnet or magnetic force inside the cloud that's drawing us!"

With every instant the tremendous wall of blackness, as sharply defined as though material, was looming closer before our whirling ship. While Korus Kan worked frantically with the controls, and while the cries of our astounded crew came up to us from beneath, I seized the distance-phone, in the hope of flashing word at least to others in the galaxy of the nature of the force that had seized us. But the distance-phone was going dead, affected by the magnetic force that was drawing us to doom!

By then the great cloud was an appalling sight ahead of us, a vast maw of darkness into which our cruiser was racing at tremendous velocity. The ship's whirling had subsided somewhat and I yelled to Korus Kan to make a last trial of its power. He strained the generators to the breaking-point in the next moment, but it was useless, for nothing could escape the relentless grip of the power that was drawing us on.

Another moment and the blackness was walling the firmament directly before our plunging ship. Something made me turn round at that moment to glance back toward the galaxy's shining suns as though for a last look, and then even as I turned round again we were plunged into a darkness to which the darkest night would have been as noonday, an utter blackness in which no faintest ray of light existed!

I groped in the darkness for the switch of the cruiser's inside lights but though it clicked beneath my fingers there came no answering illumination. Light could not exist in this terrible region! And the quivering of the cruiser about us told us that still at immense speed we were being drawn in toward the cosmic cloud's heart.

On and on we rushed through that shrouding night, Jhul Din and and Korus Kan and I bracing ourselves in the pilot room with our hands upon each other's shoulders, facing ahead as though to look through this utter blackness which no eye could pierce. I think now that in those terrible moments the three of us were but waiting in tacit silence for the end. Even were the cruiser to free itself of the deadly force that gripped it we could never now win out of this lightless region in which we would wander blindly.

Still on toward the mighty cloud's heart raced the ship, and to me it seemed that we must be very near its center. A tense expectation of the end held all of us now. But abruptly we cried out together as there came a mounting, hissing sound from outside the cruiser. Our craft was rushing now through air, through an atmosphere!

At the same moment we were aware that it was slowing its tremendous speed, that the mighty magnetic force that had drawn us inward appeared to have vanished. The stunning wonder of the two things occupied us for the moment to the exclusion of all else. Was there a world then here at the cosmic cloud's heart, through whose atmosphere our ship was now moving?

Suddenly my heart stood still as there came a slight jar against our cruiser's side, followed by a succession of flopping sounds upon the ship's top. There was silence for a brief instant while we lis-

tened tensely in the utter darkness of the pilot room, and then came a clang of metal against the cruiser's top, and the hiss of some strange force.

"It's some other ship outside!" I cried. "And they're trying to get in—they're boarding us!"

"The top space-door!" Jhul Din shouted. "They're getting in there!" For the clang of the door opening came to our ears at that moment and a flood of cold air from outside rushed through the cruiser.

"Up to the space-door, then!" I yelled. "Hold it against them, whoever they are!"

As we cried out we were bursting out of the pilot room, bumping against walls and doors in the unrelieved darkness, rushing toward the corridor into which that upper space-door opened. I heard the shouts of the crew as they too blindly hastened upward, and then as I burst into the corridor I sought I collided squarely in the darkness with something. Something that was tall and bulky and that felt like cold flesh to my touch. Instantly two great flap-like limbs or arms from it were grasping me.

I struck out in the dark with sudden frenzied horror, but as I knocked the unearthly thing from me others were about me, pouring down into the corridor from the space-door above, from outside the ship. They were all about us, in groups, scores, gripping me and Korus Kan and Jhul Din and all our crew, while we struck out blindly against them.

I HAVE fought the dread serpent-creatures in the hall of the living dead, and I have had a part in the tremendous combat of three universes, but never yet did I take part in a more terrible struggle than that one. For it was a struggle in a darkness so absolute that we could have no slightest glimpse of the creatures we fought, knowing by touch only that they were things such as we had never come into contact with before.

They were calling in flute-like tones to one another as their powerful flap-arms caught and held us, tones oddly incongruous with the wild uproar of the battle. They seemed to move as easily in the utter darkness as we might do in light, and this fact gave them a tremendous advantage over us. Because of that our wild struggle had in moments been quelled, and as I was held tightly by two of the things I heard the calls of my friends to me and realized that all of us had been overpowered. These creatures of darkness had captured our ship!

Still holding us, they herded us toward one end of the corridor, and then released us. Amazed, I took a step through the darkness toward one of the corridor's doors. But in an instant I had halted, for through the darkness a buzzing sound came to me and at the same time fiery, tearing pain ran through every nerve in my body. I staggered back, and the buzzing ceasing, the pain ended. Jhul Din and Korus Kan, who had thought to escape also in the darkness, had experienced the same thing, staggering back with me.

It was evident that our strange captors were aware in some way of every move we made in the darkness, and that the buzzing was of some pain-producing weapon of theirs. Later we were to learn that it was one that set up electrical pain-currents in the nervous system. Pain is but a sensation or electrical current in a certain nerve, and this strange weapon was one that by induction set up pain-currents of more or less intensity in every nerve in the body.

It was evident that we could not escape them in the darkness, so we remained grouped at the corridor's end. We heard the flute-like voices of the things calling to one another through the cruiser, and

in a moment or so more came the throbbling of its generators again and the hiss of air outside as it began to move. In awe we listened.

"What can they be?" whispered Korus Kan. "Creatures of darkness—creatures of the cosmic cloud who move in its darkness as though in light!"

"There must be a world here," I answered, "through whose atmosphere we're moving now. They've come up from it to capture our ship and must be taking us down to its surface now."

"But a world in this perpetual darkness? How are they able to live — to move?"

"Who can say? Whatever they are, it is clear that they have pulled the thousands of the galaxy's ships into the cloud as they did ours, for their own reasons. I wonder what fate the other ships met."

MINUTES passed while the cruiser throbbed through the darkness; then its speed decreased quickly and with a slight jar it landed upon a solid surface. At once the doors that had been closed were clanging open again and the flute-voiced creatures of darkness, using their pain-producing weapons to control us, were herding us out of the corridor and through the space-door to emerge upon a solid, smooth-paved surface. All about us was still darkness absolute but we felt ourselves in open air, on the surface of a world of unending darkness here at the cosmic cloud's heart.

Our captors began to march us forward. We moved blindly, controlled by their touches or pushes. We heard a great babel of flute-voices, of innumerable creatures coming and going around us. Reaching my hand forth occasionally I ascertained that we were marching along a series of smooth-walled and wide-doored buildings. From their doors came sometimes the clash and clang of machinery operating inside, while in and out of others were swarming hordes of flute-voiced creatures, their flopping steps sounding all around us.

It was evident that we were being taken through a city—a city of darkness absolute in which these creatures of darkness came and went as we of light would do in our own sunlit cities.

I began to understand, though, as we marched along, how these creatures could move so surely in darkness, and whispered to Korus Kan and Jhul Din that it was by their sense of hearing that they must do so, since it seemed to be entirely by the sound of our footsteps that they controlled and guided us. Yet was it possible that any race of beings could live and flourish thus and raise their cities in the cosmic cloud's darkness with only hearing to aid them?

Twice our captors wheeled our group to right or to left as though following a definite course through the streets of the lightless city. In a few moments more, though, when they touched us with their flap-arms to make us again turn, I misunderstood the touch and took a step to the right instead of the left. Instantly agony shot through my every nerve as a buzzing sounded directly beside me. That agony was so terrible and so unexpected that it made me do what never else would I have done, whirl around and strike through the darkness at the thing behind me with all my frenzied strength.

My clenched fist drove into the cold, bulky body of the thing and I felt it knocked backward by the blow, heard the buzzing cease and felt the pain stop as whatever weapon the thing had held rattled upon the paving. Instantly from the other guards came flute-like cries and the sound of flopping steps rushing toward me through the darkness. I yielded to the first instinct as I heard them and threw myself away from them, running

blindly through the darkness as their cries sounded behind me.

There came scuffling sounds and then the buzz of many of their weapons, and as I heard cries of pain I realized that my friends and crew had attempted to break loose also but had been halted by their captors. Then after me through the darkness they were racing with quick, flopping steps.

I ran madly forward, collided with a great creature and then with another, and as I blundered away from them was aware that in this world of perpetual darkness I was at a terrible disadvantage in attempting to escape the creatures of darkness who pursued me. Flute-like cries were sounding all along the street now, it seemed, a babel of shouts of alarm spreading quickly over the city. As I blundered again into a great creature whose flap-arms sought to grasp me I realized that not for long could I elude them in this darkness to which they were accustomed. Again I yielded to instinct, and as I felt beside me a wide door I threw myself through it, crouched motionless just inside it and behind the base of what felt to my touch like a great metal mechanism.

It seemed a great room in which I was, for I heard from far along it through the darkness the humming and clanging of machinery, and also the hurrying steps of many of the creatures of darkness as they left their tasks to answer the alarm of cries in the street outside. Their flapping limbs took them directly past me as they rushed to the door, and I could have reached out in the darkness and touched them. I made no move, scarcely daring to breathe; for though I was but a few feet from them, I felt sure they could become aware of my presence in the darkness only by any sounds that I might make.

I heard them answering in their strange voices utterances of the creatures outside, heard the noise of the alarm gradually receding as those who searched for me moved along the street. I breathed a little easier for a moment, but only for a moment. For as the creatures who had rushed to the door streamed back into the great room two of them halted so close beside me that their bodies actually brushed slightly against my arm.

Motionless as a statue I crouched there in the darkness, as the two conversed in their fluting voices beside me. Were they to move a fraction of an inch nearer they must discover me. Were the slightest sound to come from me my discovery was certain.

At last, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, though it could have been really no more than a few moments, the two passed on, and a kindly providence kept them from brushing nearer me as they went. Soon the activities of the great hall seemed resumed, the humming of its mechanisms coming to me again through the darkness, and the sound of the creatures among them moving from one to another.

The peril of immediate discovery seemed past, but how could I hope to escape for long in this city, this world, of eternal darkness? I could not move through it as the creatures that inhabited it did, as surely as though in day; and to stumble blindly through its streets meant swift discovery. How could I hope to find Korus Kan and Jhul Din and the others in this strange world of which I could see nothing? It seemed that by escaping for a while as I had done from our captors I was but prolonging an agony of spirit that might otherwise have been cut short, at least, by death.

In this desperate situation I strove to order my thoughts. It was apparent that to remain where I was would be useless, since though I might escape discovery for

a short time it would inevitably come. It would be better to make an effort, at least, to find the others and the cruiser, even though such an effort would be stamped from the first as hopeless. To attempt to pass through the streets of this city seemed insane, yet to do so held the one slender chance of finding the others; so I summoned all my courage and crept out through the wide door and into the smooth-paved street outside.

There, pausing helplessly in the darkness, I listened intently. From all along the street came the flopping steps of the creatures moving this way or that. It seemed to me that it was along the edges of the street that fewest of the creatures moved; so, hugging the smooth walls of the buildings, I began to creep forward.

As flopping steps approached me through the darkness ahead I halted, for I knew that the sound of my own steps would betray me to the keen hearing of these creatures. In a moment the approaching creature had passed me and again I took up my careful progress forward. Again I halted as there came other steps near me. Slowly I made my way along the street, crouching motionless whenever any of the creatures neared me, praying that they might not collide with me. Blindly I felt my way forward through this city of awful night.

At last I felt myself at the street's end, with no more of the smooth-walled buildings beside me. I seemed emerging into a great open space, across which came a tremendous bustle of activity. I moved out a little into it, crouching every few instants as flopping steps came and went about me, until I struck something like a great smoothly curving wall of metal before me. For an instant I felt of it and then was motionless in amazement, for it took but that instant for me to recognize what was before me. It was a great interstellar ship, like those that plied the galaxy in countless thousands, and like those that had been drawn into this cosmic cloud in thousands!

FOR a moment astonishment held me to the exclusion of all else. That this before me was one of the thousands of ships that had been drawn into the cloud I could not doubt. Had all then been captured like our own by these creatures of darkness? What could it mean?

I was aware that a tremendous activity was going on far around and before me, and as I made my way cautiously through the darkness along the hull of the ship I heard a stream of creatures pouring in and out of its space-doors, busy carrying in things of metal that clanked against the doors as they went through them. Avoiding them, I moved to the side and in moments had come to another great interstellar ship that was the center of a similar scene of activity. Evidently there were a great number of them in the open space before me, and as evidently they were being prepared and fitted by these creatures of darkness for some great enterprise. But that enterprise—what could it be?

I stifled the wonder and amazement that were strong in me, though, for I realized that this swarming place was one of the most dangerous I could encounter. It was inevitable that some of the creatures would collide with me in the darkness if I stayed there long, so reluctantly I crept back toward the street from which I had emerged.

It did not seem that street which I entered again, though, but a narrower one. There were in it fewer of the city's creatures than in the other street, though I heard still the flopping steps of many of them hastening to and from the open space and interstellar ships which I had just left. I started along it, blindly and aimlessly, not knowing whether I was go-

ing back in the direction from which I had come, and not caring greatly. For by that time it seemed clear to me that I was destined to wander blindly through the darkness of the city until discovered and captured, so slender seemed any hope that remained to me.

Still I observed all caution, crouching low each time the sound of approaching creatures came to my ears, not moving until they had passed. Once as I flattened myself thus the flap-like limb or foot of the passing thing actually touched my hand, so close did it come to me, but as I did not move the thing passed on.

After feeling through the darkness along this street for perhaps a thousand yards, my greatest worry being to avoid the creatures who emerged suddenly now and then from the doors along it, I was aware of a still narrower street that branched from it. I took this way, and soon realized that in this narrower way were few of the darkness creatures, they taking the broader streets that crossed the city. I met but one or two of the things in several thousand feet of progress along the street, and though it was harder to elude them in the narrower way I began to feel more confidence. It was that confidence that undid me, for as I passed the door of a building without my usual precautions there emerged suddenly from it one of the great creatures who collided squarely with me.

For an instant the thing must have been even more surprized than I was, and before it could realize what had happened I had flung myself upon it, for well I realized that flight would not serve me now.

My hands sought in vain for a hold upon the smooth, cold body, even as its own great flap-like arms wrapped themselves around me. The thing seemed to have no head or neck whatever, and was almost featureless also. But by the merest chance my hands in that first instant fell upon a narrow aperture in the cold flesh of the upper part of the body. Instantly I closed my hand over it, and as a strangled flute-cry came from it I realized that I had found the monster's mouth. Holding tightly to it and encircling its great body with my other arm I wrestled wildly with it there in the darkness of the narrow street as it sought to shake me off.

The strength of its flap-arms was tremendous, but they were impeded by the fact that I had partly pinned them against its body. Yet it was whirling me this way and that with tremendous force, against the walls and paving of the street.

Nothing but choking sounds came from it, though, and I realized that the creature was air-breathing even as I was and that my hold upon its mouth-aperture was throttling it. Desperately I clung to retain the hold, and with a strength as desperate the great thing tried to tear me loose. I knew that a single cry would bring a swarm of the things to the aid of this one, and the knowledge steeled my muscles. The wild threshing of the creature seemed rapidly lessening, and in moments more my strangling hold had done its work and with a few convulsive jerks the monster went limp and dead.

I straightened from it, panting, then froze with renewed terror. Along the narrow street other steps were approaching me, somewhat lighter steps that were moving carefully as though in investigation, halting now and then. As they came level with me they halted again, and I held my breath. But in the next instant came the sound of the steps coming straight toward me!

With something like a cry of despair on my lips I threw myself forward at the approaching one through the darkness. I knew myself discovered, expected, even as I leaped, the flute-like cry that would bring the hordes in the neighboring

streets upon me. But to my utter amazement, my hands grasped not another cold and bulky-bodied creature of darkness but a tall, erect man-like form that was making no resistance to me! I felt short, flat bat-like wings behind that body, felt a man-like head with big-beaked countenance, and then felt two muscular arms grasping my shoulders while a voice whispered tensely in my ear in the tongue of the galaxy.

"Quiet!" it whispered. "Another sound will bring them here from the other street!"

"You——" I stammered. "You're from the galaxy outside—you speak its tongue—but how in this darkness——"

"Not now!" the other warned. "I'll explain in a moment, but now we've got to get out of this street and get this dead thing out before it's discovered. Here—this way——"

Moving through the rayless opacity as a man in a dream might move, I felt myself guided by the other back to the body of the thing I had slain. We lifted it between us and my companion went a little along the street until he turned into a narrow aperture between two smooth-walled structures. Into this we cast the bulky body, and then crouched down together by it. The other had moved through the darkness as easily as through light, I had found, and my first whispered words as we crouched together were of his ability to do so.

"Here," he answered, "these disks—upon your eyes——"

As he spoke he was taking from somewhere on his person two flat little disks an inch or so across, one of which he fastened upon each of my eyes by means of vacuum-sucked rims. I uttered an involuntary cry of astonishment; for as I looked through those disks of glass, the utter darkness that had been about me since first we had been drawn into the great cloud gave way instantly to a pulsing violet light that illumined all things around me.

I could see clearly the towering walls of the two buildings between which we crouched, the narrow street outside in which I had had my battle, and my companion also. He was, I saw, in truth a tall bat-winged figure with strong beaked face and intelligent dark eyes, and I recognized him at once as one of the bat-folks who inhabit the worlds of the sun Deneb. Deneb! Thought of it brought flashing back to my mind a thing that the Chief had told us before our start, and I seized my companion's arm.

"Zat Zanat!" I cried. "You're Zat Zanat, the scientist of Deneb who went into the cloud years ago to explore it!"

He nodded. "I am Zat Zanat," he acknowledged, "and years it has been, in truth, since I came into this cosmic cloud, this place of darkness and horror unutterable."

"But it's not darkness to you!" I exclaimed, pointing to the two disks which he wore before his own eyes. "With these you can see in this absolute blackness—though I don't know how."

"I can tell you that soon enough," he said, "but you—how comes it that you were roaming this city of the creatures of darkness?"

Swiftly I explained to him how we had been sent to investigate the drawing in of thousands of the galaxy's ships into the cloud, and how having been drawn into it ourselves we had been captured and brought to this city where I had made my escape. He listened intently, nodding once or twice, and when I had finished asked a question.

"You wandered into one of the great masses of captured interstellar ships they are preparing. But did you guess why they drew those ships into the cloud, for what they are preparing them?"

At my negative his expression grew solemn. "They are preparing those thousands of captured ships, Dur Nal," he said, "for an enterprise that means horror to our galaxy: they are preparing to burst out of the cosmic cloud upon the galaxy in all their numbers and seize our suns and worlds in a conquest of darkness!"

"Of darkness?" I repeated, and he nodded.

"Within hours they leave this world and the cosmic cloud, to pour out into the galaxy, for even as we talk here their great plans are coming to their climax—plans that I have seen them form and carry out in the years I have been here.

"For it is years I have spent on this world of darkness in the great cloud. You have heard how years ago I, Zan Zanat, resolved to do what none ever had done, to explore the cosmic cloud's interior. I knew that light could not exist in it, for its darkness is formed by the meeting of ether-currents which generate etheric vibrations of a frequency that neutralizes all light-vibrations.

"It was my plan to see in the darkness of the cloud by the vibrations beyond light, the ultra-violet vibrations. They were not neutralized, not affected, and I devised certain ray-filter disks or glasses that made the eyes sensitive to the ultra-violet vibrations, and thus showed all things in violet light, since the ultra-violet rays have the same sources as light-rays.

"Equipped with these glasses I and my assistants ventured into the cosmic cloud in our cruiser. Its interior lay in violet light before us, and after cruising in near its center we descried a small planet that hung motionless in it. We landed to explore it and found it inhabited by strange eyeless creatures of darkness who had evolved on it in the ages and who, because they had evolved in utter darkness, had no eyes at all but had a hearing so marvelously keen that it served them instead.

"Hardly had we landed on this world when the creatures captured us. They took us before their rulers, who examined us. These eyeless creatures had never imagined that other worlds might lie outside the cloud, nor had they any spaceships. But learning that there were many worlds outside, they began to plan how they might pour out and seize them, for their numbers were cramped on this small world.

"My assistants they slew, but kept me, torturing me with the pain-producing weapons to gain information from me. They saw that they would need thousands of great ships to enable them to pour out on the galaxy, and had not the means of making them soon. They devised, therefore, a way of drawing in the numbers of ships they needed from those coming and going in the galaxy around the cloud.

"This was to increase many times the magnetism of their world. Every world in space is a great magnet with north and south poles, as you know, and they planned to increase the magnetic power of their world thousands of times by a means they knew, which involved the simultaneous electrical charging of both their world's poles.

"They prepared the apparatus at the poles and placed the control of it on the top of the great building of their rulers. When that control was closed the magnetism of this world at the cloud's heart was suddenly intensified thousands of times. Its tremendous power reached out through the cloud and caught great swarms of the interstellar ships passing outside, and drew them swiftly in.

"Had they left the control closed their world would have drawn in those ships to smash in annihilation against it, but just after the helpless ships were drawn into

their world's atmosphere the control was opened and the magnetic grip released. Then while the swarms of ships, helpless in the darkness, were in their atmosphere, their own ships they had constructed in small numbers and which they could operate in space by means of reflected electrical-sound vibrations instead of sight—in these ships they went up and boarded and captured the helpless vessels.

"They brought them down to this world's surface, those inside them helpless in the darkness against these people of darkness. Almost all inside the captured ships they slew with the pain-producers, but a few who they thought would be useful to them they saved and prisoned as I was prisoned in the building of the rulers.

"Soon afterward they repeated this process, closing the control and drawing in new swarms of ships from outside the cloud. And again they did the same thing and with the same result. The fourth time they captured but one ship, your own, but this can have made no difference to them, for their first three operations had brought them in thousands of great interstellar ships in which all the eyeless hordes could be contained.

"Already they had almost completed the refitting of these ships, fitting them with their vibration-guiding devices, and also with the mechanisms they will take with them for their conquest of the galaxy. These are mechanisms each of which can destroy all light for a vast space around it by neutralizing the light-vibrations even as is done by neutral forces here in the cloud.

"And with these they will conquer the galaxy inevitably. For they need but settle upon a world and with their mechanisms or one of them destroy all light in and around it. Plunged in absolute darkness, its blind peoples will be unable to strike back at the eyeless creatures who, used to darkness and at home in it, can wipe out the others at their leisure with the pain-producers.

"Already their last preparations are being finished, already their hordes streaming toward the waiting masses of interstellar ships. It was that knowledge that made me desperate, and in desperation I managed to escape from the building of the rulers that was my prison. I have kept always with me the ultra-violet sight-glasses, and with a pair of them was able to elude the creatures, hoping to steal a cruiser and get out to the galaxy to warn it. But I could not get near any of the ships, and in going through the city in a vain hope of doing so I saw you battling with and killing that creature and came to you."

WHEN Zat Zanat had finished his strange tale I was silent for a moment, gazing out into the narrow violet-lit street beside which we crouched.

"You think then that the only hope is to steal a cruiser and get out of the cloud to warn the galaxy before the attack comes?" I asked.

He nodded quickly. "What other hope is there? Nothing can halt this invasion of theirs, for before an hour more is past, it may well be, their hordes will be pouring out of the cloud in their cruisers. You can hear them making ready now."

"But what of my friends? I can't escape and leave Jhul Din and Korus Kan here, or the others either."

He thought for a moment. "For your cruiser's crew there is no hope," he said, "for the rulers would order them slain at once. If your two friends seemed of any importance, though, there is a chance that they would have been let live for a while, prisoned there in the ruler's building."

"Then it's for us to get them out," I said, and he laughed shortly.

"That's all," he agreed. "Well, one thing seems hardly more hopeless than another, and we may as well try it. But we must get your friends soon if ever, for these creatures of darkness will surely kill their prisoners to the last one before they leave."

We stood up, then ventured cautiously into the narrow street. Looking along its violet-lit length I could see in the broader street that crossed it innumerable dark shapes hastening this way and that. The buildings on each side of the streets were tall rectangular ones a few hundred feet in height, their walls smooth and black like the paving of the streets. They had doors but no windows whatever, seeming like great boxes. It was with an effort that I remembered that in unending darkness there was small need for windows.

Zat Zanat pointed out over the city to a great block-like building that towered above all others, and on whose top I could make out the shapes of resting space-ships.

"The building of the rulers," he whispered. "It's there your friends are, if they still live."

"Lead on, then," I said, and without further words we started down the narrow way.

As we came toward the broader avenue that crossed it we went more carefully, and it was here that I had my first real glimpse of the creatures of darkness with whom I had struggled and from whom and among whom I had fled. They were much as my touching hands had informed me, great upright bodies of dark flesh moving on two flap-like lower limbs and with two similar arms. In the upper part of the body the only features were the small opening of the mouth and great cup-like ears set on each side of it.

As I watched, with something of a recurrence of my former horror, I saw that the creatures seemed to judge all their movements by hearing, avoiding one another when they heard the sound of steps, and avoiding walls and other obstacles evidently by listening to the echo of their own steps. The product of evolution in the unending darkness of the cosmic cloud, hearing meant to them all that sight could mean to children of light.

ZAT ZANAT, making a sign of caution to me, stepped forward and led the way across the broader street, at a time when the stream of eyeless creatures had lessened. As we approached its other side, though, the approach of two of the monsters bearing a section of machinery between them forced us to halt lest our steps be heard. The two passed but inches from us, and unutterably strange and terrifying it was to stand silent there in the violet-lit street with those creatures flopping past. It took an effort to remember that when we made no sound they could not perceive us.

As we moved on I glanced ahead and back and saw that over all the city as far as the eye could reach, in the violet light which was in reality not light, streams of the creatures were pouring toward great square open spaces in the city where rested the thousands of captured interstellar ships. The last pieces of mechanism were being loaded into these, it seemed, and the monsters themselves were pouring into them. They were on the point of making their start out through the cloud to fall upon the galaxy's worlds!

The sight spurred us forward. Halting now and then and freezing motionless as statues to allow some of the darkness creatures to pass around or near us, we made our way through the streets until we were nearing the great building of the rulers. By then the greater part of the city's hordes had poured toward and into the massed interstellar ships, and be-

cause of that we went forward more quickly.

Zat Zanat turned now and then to whisper caution, though, and the third time that he did so I saw his eyes widen suddenly in terror behind his glasses, saw him racing back toward me with arms outstretched. With swift sense of panic I made to whirl around but before I could do so two great flap-arms had closed on me from behind, and in grasping my head knocked loose the glasses from my eyes.

Instantly I was plunged into the most profound darkness, and then as there came a rush of feet was released by the creature that had held me and sent staggering off into the darkness. I heard a terrific struggle going on in the darkness beside me, knew that Zat Zanat and the monster were locked in death-grips, but was helpless to aid my friend in the blindness that was upon me.

Rushing toward the sound of battle I was knocked back and down by a great blow that caught my face. I pawed frantically along the street in search of the glasses I had lost, heard over the scuffle in the dark the sound of Zat Zanat's gasps for breath and a smothered flute-like cry from his antagonist.

Abruptly the sounds of struggle ceased, and somewhere in the darkness a heavy weight thudded against the paving. Which of the two had won? I waited statue-like for the answer until I was grasped by the shoulders, and whirled around in sudden terror. But as I did so a hand was again pressing the eye-disks against my eyes and as the whole scene sprang from deep darkness into violet light once more I saw that it was Zat Zanat, disheveled and panting for breath, and that the other lay dead upon the paving.

"On to the building!" Zat Zanat gasped. "We've but minutes left, I think!"

We sprang forward, running now along the street, for along its whole length we could see none of the eyeless monsters, and were aware with sinking hearts that all or almost all must be already in the waiting ships. Minutes more would see them pouring out of the cloud to spread darkness and doom over the galaxy!

Down the street we ran, careless now of any that might hear, until there loomed at its end before and above us the vast box-like building of the rulers. None of the creatures of darkness could be seen around it, and we sprang toward the great square open door, then halted for an instant despite ourselves.

Far away across the city was sounding a humming as of a gigantic swarm of bees. It was a sound that I knew well and one that drove the blood from my heart. It was the sound of the generators of great space-ships throbbing, and as it sounded there was lifting over the city a mass of hundreds of the gleaming ships!

Away to our right another mass of equal size was rising, and far behind us in the strange city another, and still others at a greater distance from us, thousands of huge interstellar ships loaded with all the eyeless hordes! They were starting out from their world and from the cloud on their career of dread conquest!

"They're starting!" I cried to Zat Zanat. "We're too late!"

"Not yet!" he cried. "Look, there's still a ship waiting on the roof! They must be slaying their prisoners now!"

For on the roof of the great building before us we glimpsed a waiting cruiser that had not yet risen. The significance of it and of Zat Zanat's cry drove home to my brain at the same instant. It was waiting for those in the building, those

who were killing the prisoners they had kept there. And Jhul Din and Korus Kan——!

I uttered a cry of rage, leapt forward and through the door with Zat Zanat close behind me. I vaguely glimpsed great halls through which we raced, queer seats and desks and instruments, and then with my companion beside me was leaping up the broad flight of curving steps ahead.

Up it and up another stair we raced, and then my face blanched and I threw myself on at greater speed as from somewhere in the great building over us came shriek on shriek of the most dreadful agony, ending in each case in quick silence but taken up at once by other voices.

"The pain-producers!" Zat Zanat sobbed. "They're slaying the prisoners with them!"

"Jhul Din! Korus Kan!" I cried, madly, and then cried out again as there came to me from above somewhere a faint answering shout. We rushed up into the next level, along a broad corridor, and halted before a solid door from behind which came the cries of my friends.

I threw myself frantically at the door but the secret of its lock defied me, and it was diamond-hard in material. Other shrieks came now from the floor above us, and then as they ended came the flopping steps of the eyeless creatures coming down the stair to finish these their last prisoners.

Zat Zanat jerked me swiftly aside from the door. "Wait!" he commanded, and as I understood his purpose I froze instantly silent and motionless with him.

Down the stair and into the corridor came a half-dozen great eyeless monsters who carried with them funnel-like instruments of metal that I knew were the pain-producers. Their flute-voices sounded as they hastened along the hall toward the door by which we stood. We saw one finger with his flap-hands the mechanism on the door, and then as it swung open two had raised their funnel-like weapons toward the two inside. But it was then that Zat Zanat and I leaped.

A wild chorus of flute-cries went up as we crashed into them, and two sprawled motionless beneath our striking arms before the others could comprehend what was happening. And at the same moment there rushed through the open door Korus Kan and Jhul Din, the Antarian's powerful arms striking right and left and Jhul Din's great voice booming in rage as he laid about him.

Both Korus Kan and Jhul Din, though, were fighting in darkness absolute, not having the ultra-violet light disks that enabled Zat Zanat and me to see, and though five of the eyeless monsters had gone down in the first frenzied moment of the battle the others were turning with incredible speed, perceiving all our movements by hearing, to strike back at us.

In a moment Korus Kan was down, drawing another of the eyeless things with him. Jhul Din had blindly gripped two of them and was squeezing the life from them with his immense arms. Before either Zat Zanat or I could throw ourselves upon the remaining creature, though, he had leaped back from the battle and had raised his funnel-like weapon. A buzzing sound came from it and instantly through all of us in every nerve seared a white-hot agony that seemed to rive our brains asunder.

I was staggering against the wall in that awful torture, and Korus Kan and Jhul Din, though they had killed their opponents, were writhing in agony. I saw the creature holding the weapon coming closer toward us with it, knew that an instant more of that agony meant the death they had dealt their pris-

oners. But at that moment there took place before my eyes one of the bravest things that ever was looked upon.

Zat Zanat had been nearest the creature when it had turned its weapon on us, and had staggered in that awful agony as we had, but as the thing came closer he straightened as with a terrible effort, summoned by a supreme command of his reeling brain all the power of his tortured muscles, and bounded forward in a single agonized leap that sent him crashing against the monster.

As he struck the creature its weapon was knocked from its grasp, and as the pain that was killing us abruptly ceased we rushed to where the two struggled and in a moment the creature lay dead with the others. We staggered up unsteadily, Zat Zanat handing from his belt pouch ultra-violet glasses to my two friends.

"To the roof!" he cried.

"The roof—that cruiser on it is our one chance to get out of the cloud and warn the galaxy before the attack comes!"

Even as we cried out that, we were bounding up the curving stairs from floor to floor until in a moment more we were bursting out onto the broad flat roof of the great building. In a single glance we took in the whole scene. At the roof's center rose a square block that was the center of innumerable branching electrical connections and that bore upon it a great lever-switch or control now open, the control Zat Zanat had described which made of this world a colossal-powered magnet when closed. To one side of the roof rested a long cruiser with no occupants, the ship that had been awaiting the half-dozen creatures who had tarried to slay the prisoners.

But as we burst out into the roof's violet light it was not at these things we were looking but at what was around and above us. The whole city, the whole world around us, were deserted! High above us we made out a tremendous swarm of black spots, which were rapidly diminishing in size as they moved away. *They were the thousands of interstellar ships and they were going forth with all the eyeless hordes inside them to the conquest of the galaxy!*

"They've started — started out of the cloud! We're too late!"

"Too late!"

The words seemed like tocsins of doom in our ears as we stood there motionless, Jhul Din and Korus Kan and Zat Zanat and I, gazing at that vast armada going out to spread death and destruction across our universe. Never could the galaxy's peoples of light stand against those dread people of darkness who would spread darkness before them. Never could we outdistance them even to warn the galaxy of the coming attack. As though petrified we stared after those receding swarms of ships. Too late!

Abruptly our dazed brains became conscious of a strange sound beside us. Zat Zanat was laughing. High and mirthless and hysterical laughter it was; half choking and with his whole body trembling he reeled sidewise across the roof toward the great block at its center. And in the next moment, with the same strange high laughter upon his lips, he had reached up to the big control-switch on the block and with a single motion had closed it, a deep throbbing coming from beneath somewhere as he did so.

We stared at Zat Zanat in frozen silence, saw him swaying toward us, saw him pointing upward with face suddenly twisted, intense. We looked up. The great swarms of diminishing black dots that were the space-ships were still above but they were receding no longer! They seemed growing larger! Something, memory or thought, crashed like thunder through my brain. The control that Zat Zanat had closed! The control that made

of this world a magnet of colossal power, and that the creatures of darkness had used to draw into the cloud those thousands of ships! And it was closed now!

"The ships!" Jhul Din cried madly. *"They're being drawn back to this world!"*

"Drawn back—and they're crashing—crashing!"

For we but glimpsed the thousands of mighty ships growing greater above us with terrific speed, whirling back broadside in utter confusion and broken masses, when with a prolonged roar of thundering crashes they were smashing into the surface of the mighty magnet-world that had drawn them back! The planet's surface shook and rolled beneath the gigantic simultaneous concussion of those vast swarms of vessels that it had drawn back with awful force toward it, and as we were flung from our feet the world seemed riven by the vast metal masses crashing at terrible speed into it, none striking the roof on which we were only by grace of that fact that none had been directly over us.

For a terrible moment the giant thunder-roll of the crashing ships split the air about us, and then as it lessened, the swaying of the building beneath us subsided and we staggered to our feet.

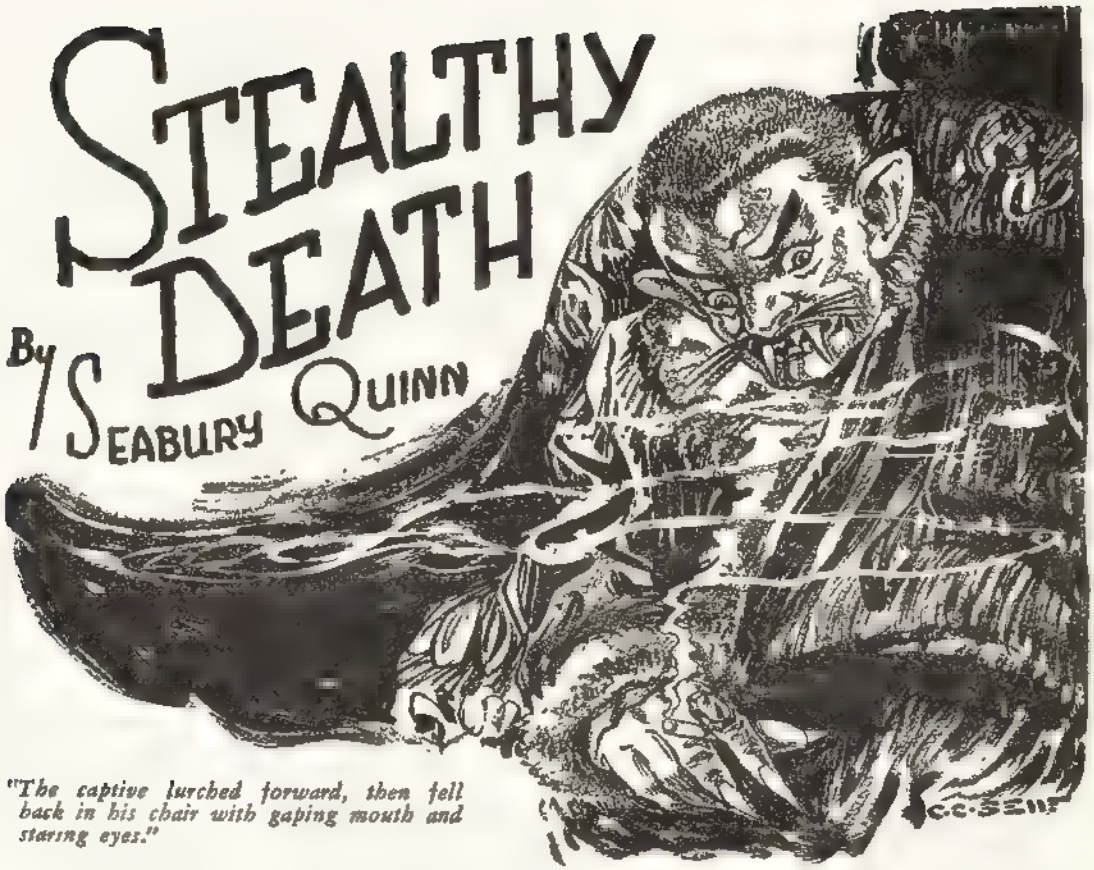
Around us lay a world of annihilation and death, its surface, save for an unharmed building here and there like our own, but one vast plain of wreckage! The wreckage of the thousands of ships that would have spread horror and death over all the galaxy; the wreckage that held the dead and broken hordes of all the eyeless creatures; the wreckage that marked the annihilation of their race and of all their tremendous plans! And that annihilation had been brought on them at the last by their own work, by the control that made of their world a colossal magnet to draw all ships toward it. They had used it to draw the galaxy's ships into the cloud, into their world's atmosphere to be captured, but at the last it had been used to draw those ships with all their hordes inside them back to this world, to crash into it and into annihilation!

For moments Jhul Din and Korus Kan and Zat Zanat and I stared at that scene of terrific death, and then, flinging open the great magnet-control again, we were climbing into the waiting cruiser, slamming its space-door shut. As we gained its pilot room I grasped the wheel and controls, and as the generators throbbed beneath my touch I shot the ship upward from that world of awful death and into the violet glow over it, heading at mounting speed out and toward the violet light-points that were the galaxy's stars. The glasses fell from our tired eyes as we swayed there, and again the absolute darkness of the great cloud was upon us; but I did not stop to replace them but held the racing cruiser steady on its course at a speed terrific.

Out through the darkness of the cloud we were rushing almost in moments, so great was our speed; for soon we shot abruptly out of its stygian lightlessness into clear space once more, into clear view of the galaxy's familiar stars. Even then, though, I did not slow our racing ship, but with Jhul Din and Korus Kan and Zat Zanat slumped beside me kept the cruiser racing straight onward—straight away from the vast blackness diminishing in the heavens behind us, straight away from the cosmic cloud which its people of darkness had thought to leave but which would hold them now in silence and in death forever.

STEALTHY DEATH

By Seabury Quinn



"The captive lurched forward, then fell back in his chair with gaping mouth and staring eyes."

1. The Second Murder

"PARADE—*rest!* Sound off!" Playing in quick time, the academy band marched across the field, executed a perfect countermarch and returned to its post at the right of the ordered ranks of cadets. As the bandsmen came to a halt the trumpets of the drum corps, gay with fringed tabards, belled forth the slow, appealing notes of retreat, and: "Battalion—*'tention!* Present—*arms!*" came the adjutant's command as *The Star-Spangled Banner* sounded and the national color floated slowly from its masthead.

Jules de Grandin's white-chamois gloved right hand cupped itself before his right ear in a perfect French army salute, his narrow, womanish shoulders squared back and his little, pointed chin thrust up and forward as the evening sun picked half a thousand answering beams from the burnished bayonets on the presented rifles. *"Parfait, exquis; magnifique!"* he applauded. *"C'est très beau,* that, my friend. You have here a fine aggregation of young men. Certainly."

I nodded absently. My thoughts were not on the stirring spectacle of the parade, nor upon the excellence of Westover Military Academy's student body. I was dreading the ordeal which lay before me when, the parade dismissed, I must tell Harold Pancoast of his father's awful death. "He'll take it better than you, Doctor Trowbridge!" the widow had whispered between tremulous lips, and:

"Poor boy, this is tragic!" the headmaster had told me deprecatingly. "Won't you wait till after parade, Doctor? Pancoast is Battalion Adjutant, and I think it would be kinder to let him

complete his duties at parade before we break the news."

"Confound it!" I complained bitterly more than once; "why did they have to give me this job? The family lawyer, or——"

"*Mais non,* my friend," de Grandin comforted. "It is the way of life. We are born in others' pain; we perish in our own, and between beginning and end stands the physician. We help them into the world, we watch beside their sickbeds, we make their exits into immortality as painless as possible—at the last we stay to comfort those who remain. These are the obligations of our trade." He sighed. "It is, *hélas,* too true. Had kindly heaven given me a son I should have sternly forbid him to study medicine—and I should most assuredly have cracked his neck had he done otherwise!"

The last gold rays of the dying October sun were slanting through the red and russet leaves of the tree-lined avenue leading to the administration building as we waited in the headmaster's office for young Pancoast. At last he came, sauntering easily along the red-brick walk, plainly in no haste to answer the official summons, laughing as only carefree youth can laugh, and looking with more than friendly regard into the face of his companion. Indeed, she was a sight to brighten any eye. A wistful, seeking look was on her features, her fine dark hair lay round her delicate, pale face like a somber nimbus, and the Chinese coat of quilted black satin she wore against the light evening chill was lined and collared with soft orange-pink which set off her brunette pallor to perfection. "*Parbleu,* he chooses nicely, that one," de Grandin approved as the lad bade his companion adieu with a smart military salute and turned to mount the steps to the headmaster's sanctum.

I drew a deep breath and braced myself, but I might have known the boy would take the blow like the gentleman he was. "Dead—*my* Dad?" he murmured slowly, unbelievingly as I concluded my evil tidings. "How? When?"

"Last night, *mon pauvre,*" de Grandin took the conversation from me. "Just when, we do not know, but that he met his death by foul play there is no room for doubting. The steel of the assassin struck him from behind—a sneaking, cowardly blow, but a mighty one, *mon brave*—so that he died instantly, without pain or struggle. It is for us—you and us—to find the one responsible and give him up to justice. Yes. Certainly. You accept the challenge? Good! Bravely spoken, like the soldier and the gentleman you are; I do salute you——" He drew himself to rigid attention, raising his hand with precise military courtesy.

Admiringly, I saw the Gallic subtlety with which he had addressed the lad. Had I been telling him, I should have minimized the tragic aspects of his father's death as much as possible. The Frenchman, on the contrary, had thrown them brutally before the boy, and then, with sure psychology, diverted thoughts of grief and horror by holding out the lure of vengeance.

"You're right!" the youngster answered, his chin thrust forth belligerently. "I don't know who'd want to harm my Dad—he never hurt a fly that didn't bite him first—but when we find the one who did it, we—by God, sir, we'll hang him high as Haman!"

Arrangements were quickly made. Indefinite leave was granted Harold, and I parked my car before his dormitory while he completed hurried packing for the journey to his desolated home.

"Strikes me he's taking an unconscionable time to stuff his bags," I grumbled when we had waited upward of an hour. "Perhaps he's broken down, de Grandin

—I've seen sturdier lads than he collapse like deflated balloons in similar circumstances—will you excuse me while I run in and see if he's all right?"

The little Frenchman nodded and I hastened to the upper-story room young Pancoast shared with a classmate.

"Pancoast? No, sir," his roommate replied to my hurried inquiry. "He came in about an hour ago and told me his trouble, then stuffed his gear into his kit bag there"—he indicated the great pigskin valise resting in a corner of the room —"and said he had to see some one before he left for home. I thought perhaps he'd decided to go on without his grip and would send for it later. Terrible thing, his father's death, wasn't it, sir?"

"Quite," I answered. "You've no idea where he went, or why, I suppose?"

The lad colored slightly. "I——" he began, then stopped, embarrassed.

"Out with it!" I ordered curtly. "His mother's on the verge of collapse at home, and he's needed there. It's the better part of three hours' steady drive, too."

"I'm not sure, sir," the cadet answered, evidently of divided mind whether to hold fast the confidence imposed in him or break the school's unwritten law in deference to the emergency; "I'm not *certain* where he went, but—well, he's been pretty spoony on a *femme* ever since the semester started, and—maybe—he ran over to say good-bye. But it shouldn't take him this long, and——"

"All right," I broke in bruskly, "never mind the details. Where's this young woman likely to be found? We're in a hurry, son." I bent and seized the waiting kit-bag as I spoke, then paused significantly at the door.

"I haven't her address, sir," the lad replied, "Panny never mentioned it to me, but you'll be likely to find him down in Rogation Walk—that's the little lane south of the campus by the old Military Road, you know—they usually meet there between retreat and tattoo."

"Very well, I'll hunt him there," I answered. "Thanks for the information. Good-night."

HAROLD PANCOAST lay as he had fallen, his uniform cap, top down, on the bricks of the shaded walk, the black-braided collar and gray shoulders of his blouse stained rusty red. Transversely across the back of his head, where hair-line joined the neck, gaped a long incised wound from which blood, already beginning to congeal, was welling freely, and in which there showed a trace of the grayish-white of cerebro-spinal fluid. His hands were stretched above him and clenched convulsively. The blow which struck him down must have been a brutally powerful one, delivered with some sharp, heavy instrument and wielded with monstrous force, for it had hacked its way half through the atlas of his spine and, glacing upward, cut deeply in the lower occiput. No need to ask if he were dead; the guillotine could scarcely have worked with more efficiency upon the poor lad's neck.

As I gazed at him in horror another horror crept over me. Though I had not inspected his father's injuries, Parnell, the coroner's physician, had described them with the ghoulish gusto of his trade, and there before me on the son there lay the very reproduction of the wound which cost the father's life not twenty hours earlier!

"Good heavens!" I gasped, and my pounding heart-beats almost stopped my breath. "This is devilish!"

I turned and raced along the quiet, tree-rimmed walk in search of Jules de Grandin.

2. *The Third Murder*

"SURE, Doctor de Grandin, sor, 'tis th' divil's own puzzle we've got here, an' no mistake," confided Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello as he knocked an inch of ash from his cigar and turned worried blue eyes on the diminutive Frenchman. "First off, we've got th' murther o' this here now Misther Pancoast—an' th' divil's own murther it were, too, sor—an' now we've got th' case of his kid to consider; though, th' blessèd saints be praised, *that* case is what ye might call academic, since it happened outside me jurisdiction entirely, an' catchin' o' th' scoundrel as done it is none o' me official business, unless, belike——"

Jules de Grandin nodded shortly. "It is very exceedingly belike, indeed, my friend," he interrupted. "Consider, if you please. What are the facts?" He raised his small left hand and spread the fingers fanwise, then counted on them in succession. "First we have this Monsieur Pancoast the elder, a fine and honest gentleman, if all reports be true. Very good. Night before last he leaves the dinner table for a meeting of his lodge, and drives off in his motor car. He shows no sign of worriment at the meeting; he is his usual smiling self. Very well. Precisely at eleven o'clock he leaves, for they have worked the third degree, and food is being served, but he is on a diet and can not stay to eat. That is too bad. Two fellow members see him enter his sedan and drive away toward home. What happens afterward we do not surely know; but in the morning he is found beside the door of his garage, face downward on the ground, and weltering in blood. His neck is chopped across the back, his spine is all but severed and the instrument of death has cloven through his skull and struck the *corpus dentatum* of his brain."

He nodded solemnly. " 'Why has this thing been done?' I ask. To find the criminal in this case means we must find the motive, but where can it be found? We can not say. This Monsieur Pancoast is a most estimable citizen, a member of the church and of the Rotary Club, a bank director, a one-time city councilman. Yet he is dead—murdered. The case is veiled in mystery.

"*Eh bien,* if the father's case is obscure, what shall we think of the son's? A fine young man, who had harmed no one, and whom no one could reasonably wish to harm. Yet he, too, is dead—murdered—and murdered with the same strange technique as that which killed his father.

"Attend me: You, *Sergent,* have seen much killing, both in war and peace; Trowbridge, my friend, you are a surgeon and anatomist; can either of you match the wounds which slew these poor ones in all of your experience?"

I shook my head. "Not I," I answered. "I can understand how a blow might be delivered in such a way as to cut the tip of the spine, or how the base of the skull could be cut through, but these wounds are beyond me. Parnell described Pancoast's injuries to me, and it seems they were identical with Harold's. His opinion was that no such upward-slanting blow could have been struck unless the victim lay prone, and even then the weapon used would have to be curved, like a carpenter's adz, for instance, to permit the course these incisions followed."

"*Ah bah,* Parnell, he is an old woman in trousers!" de Grandin shot back. "Better would he exercise such talents as he has in a butcher shop, I think. Consider him: He says the victim must be

prone. *Grand dieu des cochons!* Did we not examine the poor *petit Monsieur?* But certainly. And did we not find him stretched face downward on the earth? Yes, again. But with his tight-clenched hands above his head, as though he clutched at nothing while he fell? Of course. His attitude was one of having fallen, and he who lies upon the earth must find it impossible to fall. *Voilà,* he was killed standing; for had he lain flat upon the ground when he was struck, he must inevitably have writhed in reflex death-agony when that blow shore through his spine and skull; but standing he would have made a single wild clutch for support, then stiffened as he fell upon his face. His nerves and muscles were disposed to hold him upright, and when death comes from sudden wounding of the brain, reaction of rigidity is almost instant. You have seen it, *Sergent;* so have I. A soldier in the charge, by example, is drilled through the head by a rifle ball. He staggers on a step or two, perhaps, and then he falls, or it is better to say he topples forward, stiff and straight as though at attention, and hours afterward his poor, dead hands still grasp his musket tightly. But if that same man lies on the earth when he meets death that way, the chances are nine hundred in a thousand that he will twist and writhe, at least in one final spasm, before he stiffens. But certainly. It is for that reason that the condemned one is strapped tight to the cradle of the guillotine. If he were not, the reflex nervous action consequent upon decapitation—which is no more than a sudden injury to the spine, my friends—would surely cause him to roll sidewise on the scaffold floor, and that would rob the execution of its dignity. Yes, it is undoubtlessly so."

"Well, be gob, sor, ye're makin' th' dose harder to take than ever," Costello muttered. "First ye tell us that th' same felly kilt th' both o' them; then ye demonstrate beyant th' shadder o' a doubt that no one livin' could 'a' struck th' blows as kilt 'em. What's th' answer, if anny?"

"*Hélas,* as yet there is none," de Grandin returned. "Tomorrow, when the funeral has been held, I shall investigate, and probably I shall be wiser when I finish. Until that time we only know that some one for some motive as yet unguessed has done away with son and father, and from the difficult technique of both the murders, I am most confident is was the same assassin who perpetrated them. As for the motive——"

"That's just it, sor," Costello interrupted. "There ain't none."

"*Précisément, mon vieux,* as I was saying, this seeming absence of motive may prove most helpful to us in our researches. It is better to be lost in the midst of impenetrable night than to be witch-led by will-o'-the-wisps. So in this case. With no false leads, we commence from the beginning—start from scratch, as your athletes say. Yes, it is better so."

"Ye—ye mean to say because there's naythe hide nor hair o' motive, nor rime nor reason to these here killin's, th' case is easier?" Costello demanded.

"You have removed the words from my lips, *mon brave.*"

"Glory be to God—'tisn't Jerry Costello who'd like to see what ye'd be afther callin' a har-rd case, then!" the Irishman exclaimed.

The little Frenchman grinned delightedly. "Forgive me if I seem to jerk your leg, my old one," he apologized. "Let us gather here tomorrow at this time, and we shall talk more straightly to the point, for we shall then know what we know not now."

"Be gob, 'tis meself that's hopin' so," Costello responded with none too much optimism in his tone.

A MOTORCADE of black and shining limousines was ranked beneath the Lombardy poplars which stood before the Pancoast house. Frock-coated gentlemen and ladies in subdued attire ascended the front steps, late floral deliveries were unostentatiously shunted to the kitchen door and signed for by a black-coated, gray-gloved gentleman. The air in the big drawing-room was heavy with the scent of carnations and tuberoses.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Trowbridge; how are you, Doctor de Grandin?" Coroner Martin, officiating in his private capacity of funeral director, met us in the hall. "There are two seats over by that window," he added in an undertone. "Take my advice and get them while you can, the air in here is thick enough to choke you."

"Bien merci," de Grandin murmured, treading an assortment of outstretched feet as he wove his way between the rows of folding chairs to the vacant seats beside the window. Arrived, he perched on the extreme forward rim of the chair, his silk hat held tenderly with both hands on his knees, his little, round blue eyes fixed unwinkingly upon the twin caskets of polished mahogany, as though he would drag their secrets from them by very force of will.

The funeral rites began. The clergyman, a man in early middle life who liked to think that Beecher's mantle had fallen on him, was more than generous with his words. Unrelated and entirely inapposite excerpts from Scripture were sandwiched between readings from the poets, his voice broke and quavered artistically as he spoke feelingly of "these our dear departed brethren;" when the time came for final prayer I was on the verge of sleep.

"Capote d'une anguille," de Grandin murmured angrily, "does he take the good God for a fool? Must he be telling him these poor ones met their deaths by murder? Does *le bon Dieu* not yet know what every one in Harrisonville already knows by heart? Bid him say 'Amen' and cease, Friend Trowbridge; my neck is breaking; I can no longer bow my head!"

"S-s-s-sh!" I ordered in a venomous whisper, reinforcing my order with a sharp dig of my elbow in his ribs. "Be quiet; you're irreverent!"

"Mordieu, I am worse; I am impatient," he breathed in my ear, and raised his head to cast a look of far from friendly import on the praying divine.

"Ah?" I heard him breathe between his teeth. *"A-a-ah?"* Abruptly he bowed his head again, but I could see his sidelong glance was fixed on some one seated by the farther window.

When the interminable service was at length concluded and the guests had filed out, de Grandin made excuse to stay. The motor cars had left, and only one or two assistants of the mortician remained to set the funeral room in order, but still he lingered in the hall. "This cabinet, my friend," he drew me toward an elaborate piece of furniture finished in vermilion lacquer and gold-leaf, "is it not a thing of beauty? And this"—he pointed to another piece of richly inlaid brass and tortoise-shell—"surely this is a work of art."

I shrugged impatiently. "Do you think it good taste to take inventory of the furniture at such a time?" I asked acidly.

"One wonders how they came here, and when," he answered, ignoring my remark; then, as a servant hurried by with

brush and dustpan, "Can you tell me whence these came?" he asked.

The maid, a woman well past middle life, gave him a look which would have withered any one but Jules de Grandin, but he met her frown with a smile of such frank artlessness that she relented despite herself.

"Yes, sir," she returned. "Mr. Carlin —Mr. Pancoast, sir—God rest him!— brought them home with him when he returned from India. We used to have a ruck of such-like things, but he sold most all of 'em; these two are all that's left."

"Indeed, then Monsieur Pancoast was once a traveler?"

"Well, I don't rightly know about that, sir. I only know the talk around the house; you see, I've only been here twenty years, and he came back long before that. It's only what Mrs. Hussy—she used to cook here, and had worked for the family long before I came—it's only what she told me that I know for certain, sir, and even that's just hearsay."

"Bien, quite so, *exactement,"* he answered thoughtfully and slipped a folded bill into her hand. "And can you by some happy chance tell one where he may find this queen among cooks, this peerless Madame Hussé?"

"Yes, sir, that I can; she's living at the Bellefield Home. She bought an an-uty and——"

"A which?" de Grandin asked.

"An an-uty—a steady income, sir. She bought it when she left service and went to live at the home. She's past eighty years old, and——"

"Parbleu, then we must hurry if we wish to speak with her!" de Grandin interrupted with a bow. "I thank you for the information.

"Expect me when I return, my friend," he told me as we reached the street. "I may be early or I may be late; that depends entirely upon this Madame Hussé's powers as a conversationist. At any rate, it would be wiser if you did not wait for me at dinner."

IT WAS fortunate we did not wait on him, for nine o'clock had struck and dinner was long over when he came bursting in the door, his little round blue eyes alight with excitement, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "Has the good Costello yet arrived?" he asked as he looked hastily around the study as though he half suspected the great Irishman might be hidden beneath the couch or desk.

"Not yet," I answered, but——" The ringing of the doorbell cut me short, and the big detective entered. A parenthesis of worry-wrinkles lay between his brows, and the look he gave de Grandin was almost one of appeal.

"Well, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he remarked, brightening as he noted the little Frenchman's expression, "what's in th' news-bag? There's sumpin' up yer sleeve beside yer elbow, I can see it be th' look o' ye."

"You have right, my friend," de Grandin answered. "Did not I tell you that the absence of a motive was a cheerful sign for us? But yes. Attend me!

"At Monsieur Pancoast's late abode this afternoon I chanced to spy two objects of *vertu* the like of which we do not ordinarily find outside of museums. Jules de Grandin, he has traveled much, and what he knows he knows. The importation of such things is rare, for they are worth their weight in gold and—a thousand pardons if I give offense—Americans as a class are not yet educated to their beauty. Only those who have lived long in the East appreciate them, and few have brought them home. Therefore I

asked a most excellently garrulous maid-servant who was passing if she could tell me whence they came, and though she knew but little she gave to me the clue for which I searched, for she said first that Monsieur Pancoast brought them from India—which was not so—and that she had heard as much from a former cook, which was indubitably true.

"*Alors,* to Bellefield I did go to interview this Madame Hussé who had once been cook for Monsieur Pancoast, and she did tell me much. *Mais oui,* she told me a very great deal, indeed.

"She told me, by example, that he had studied for the ministry as a young man, and had gone to preach the Gospel in Burma. She had known him from a lad, and much surprized she was when he decided on the missioner's vocation, for he had been a—how do you say? a gay dog?—among the ladies, and such behavior as his and the minister's black coat did not seem to her in harmony.

"*Eh bien,* there is no sinner so benighted he can not see the light if he will but look toward it, and so it was with this one. Young Pancoast assumed the ministry and off he went to battle with the Evil One and teach the heathen to wear clothes.

"Now what transpired in the East she does not know; but that he returned home again and not with empty pockets, she knows full well, for great was the surprize of every one when the erstwhile poor clergyman returned and set himself up in business. And he did prosper mightily. *Tiens,* it was the wonder of the city how everything he touched seemed transmuted into gold. Yes. And then, though well along in years for marrying, he wedded Mademoiselle Griggsby, whose father was most wealthy and whose social standing was above reproach. By her he had one son, whose name was Harold. Does not an explanation, or at least a theory, jump to your eye?"

"Because he married Griggsby's daughter an' had a son named Harold?" Costello asked with heavy sarcasm. "Well, no sor; I can't say as how me eye is troubled with anny explanation jumpin' in it yet awhile."

"*Zut,* it is permissible to be stupid, but you abuse the privilege!" the little Frenchman snapped. "You know something of the East, I take it? Monsieur Kipling has neatly phrased it:

"' . . . somewheres East of Suez,
Where the best is like the worst,
And there ain't no Ten Commandments——'

"Ah? You begin to perceive? In that sun-flogged land of Burma the best *is* like the worst, or becomes so shortly after arrival. The white man's morale —and morals—break down, the saint becomes a sinner overnight. The native men are worse than despicable, the native women—*eh bien,* who suffers hunger in an orchard or dies of thirst amid running brooks, my friends? Yes, strange things happen in the East. The laws of man may be enforced, but those of God are flouted. The man who is respectable at home has no shame in betraying any woman whose skin bears the sun's kiss-marks or at turning any shabby deal which lines his purse with gold and takes him home again in affluence. No. And *Pancoast quit the ministry in Burma.* A Latin or a Greek or Anglican priest may not quit his holy orders unless he is ecclesiastically unfrocked, but clergymen of the Protestant sects may lay their office down as lightly as a businessman resigning his position. Pancoast did. He said as much to Madame Hussé when once he had a bursting-out of confidence. Remember, she had known him from a little lad.

"Now, what have you to say?"

"Well, sor," Costello answered slowly, "I know ye're speakin' truth about th' East. I served me time in th' Philippines, an' seen many a man go soft in morals underneath that sun, which ain't so different from th' sun in Burma. I'm afther thinkin', but——"

"There is a friend of Monsieur Pancoast, a boyhood chum, who went in business with him after his return," de Grandin broke in. "By good chance it may be that you know him; his name is Dalky, and he was associated with Pancoast until some ten years since, when they had a quarrel and dissolved their partnership. This Monsieur Dalky, perhaps, can be of ser——"

The strident ringing of the telephone cut through his narrative.

"It's you they want," I told Costello, handing him the instrument.

"Hullo? Sure—been here fer—Howly Mither, is it so? I'll be right over!"

He clashed the monophone into its hooks and turned on us with blazing eyes.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "here's wor-rk fer us, an' no time to delay. Whilst we've been settin' here like three dam' fools, talkin' o' this an' that, there's murther bein' done. 'Tis Missis Pancoast. They got her. Th' Lord help us—they've wiped out the whole family, sors, right beneath our very noses!"

3. *The Message on the Card*

THE servant we had talked with after the funeral met us in the hall when we reached the Pancoast home. "No, sir," she answered Costello's inquiries, "I can't tell you much about it. Mrs. Pancoast came back from the cemet'ry in a terrible state—not crying nor taking on, but sort o' all frozen up inside, you know. I didn't hear her speak a word, except once. She'd gone into her bow-duer upstairs and laid down on the couch, and along about four o'clock I thought maybe a cup o' tea might help her some, so I went up with it. She'd got up, and was standing looking at a picture o' Mr. Harold in his uniform that hung on the wall—an almost life-sized portrait it is. Just as I come into the room—I didn't knock, for I didn't want to disturb her if she was sleeping—she said, 'O, my baby; my belovèd baby boy!' Just that and nothing else, sir. No crying or anything, you understand. Then she turned and seen me standing there with the tea, and said, 'Thank you, Jane, put it on the table, please,' and went back and lay down on the couch. She was calm and collected as she always was, but I could see the heart of her was breaking inside her breast, all the same.

"She didn't come down to supper, of course, so I took some toast and eggs up to her. The tea I'd brought earlier was standing stone-cold on the table, sir; she hadn't poured a drop of it. When I went in she thanked me for the supper and had me set it on the table, and I left.

"It was something after nine o'clock, maybe, when the young woman called."

"Eh? A young woman? Do you tell me? This is of interest. Describe her, if you please," de Grandin ordered.

"I can't say as I can, sir," the woman answered. "She wasn't very tall, and she wasn't exactly what you'd call short, either. She was just medium, not tall nor short, thin nor fat. Her hair, as far as I could see, was dark, and her face was rather pale. I guess you'd call her pretty, though there was a sort o' queer, goggle-eyed expression to her that made me think—well, sir, you know how young folks are these days, what with Prohibition and cocktail parties and all—if I'd smelled anything, I'd have said she'd been drinking too much, but there wasn't

any odor of alcohol about her, though she did have some kind o' strong, sweet perfume. She asked to see Mrs. Pancoast, and when I said I didn't think she could be seen, she said it was most urgent; that Mrs. Pancoast would surely see her if I'd take her card up. So she handed me a little note in an envelope—not just a visiting-card, sir—and I took it up, though I didn't feel right about doing it.

"Mrs. Pancoast didn't want to be bothered at first; told me to send the young lady away, but when she read what was written on the card her whole manner changed. She seemed all nervous and excited-like, right away, and told me to show the visitor right up.

"They stayed there talking about fifteen minutes, I should judge; then the two of 'em came down, the young lady still blear-eyed and sort o' dazed-looking and Mrs. Pancoast in an awful hurry. She was more excited than I'd ever seen her in all the twenty years I've worked here. It seemed to me like she was all trembly and twitching-like, sir. They got into the taxi, and——"

"Oh ho, there wuz a taxi, wuz there?" Costello interrupted.

"Why, yes, sir; didn't I say the young lady came in a taxi?"

"Ye did not; an' ye're neglecting to tell whether 'twas th' same one she came in that took them off, but——"

"Yes, sir, it was. She kept it waiting, sir."

"Oh, did she, now? I don't suppose ye noted its number?"

"No, sir, I didn't; but——"

"Or what kind it wuz—yellow, blue or——"

"I'm not exactly certain it *was* a taxi, sir, now I come to think of it. It was sort o' dark-colored, and——"

"An' had four wheels wid rubber tires on each o' em, I suppose? Ye're bein' mighty helpful to us, so ye are, I must say. Now git on wid it. What happened next?"

"Nothing happened, sir. They drove off, and I went on about my work. First I tidied up the bow-duer and took away the supper tray—Mrs. Pancoast hadn't touched a bite—then I came downstairs and——"

"Howly St. Bridget! *Will* ye be gittin' on wid it?" Costello almost roared. "We'll admit fer th' sake o' argyment that ye done yer duties and done 'em noble, but what we're afther tryin' to find out, if ye'd please be so kind as to tell us, is when ye first found out Mrs. Pancoast had been kilt, and how ye found it out."

The woman's eyes snapped angrily. "I was coming to that," she answered tartly. "I'd come down to the basement to wash the supper things from Mrs. Pancoast's tray, when I heard a ringing at the lower front door—the tradesmen's door, you know. I went to answer it, for Cook had gone, and—oh, Mary, Mother! It was terrible!

"She lay there, gentlemen, head-foremost down the three steps that leads to the gate under the porch stairs, and blood was running all over the steps. I almost fainted, but luckily I remembered to call the coroner to come and take it—her, I mean—away. Oh, I'll never, never be able to go up those service steps again!"

"Ten thousand small and annoying active little blue devils!" de Grandin swore. "Do you tell me they took her away—removed the body before we had a chance to view it?"

"Yes, sir; of course. I knew the proper thing to do was not to touch it—her, I mean—until the coroner had come, so I 'phoned him right away and——"

"Oh, ye did, did ye?" Costello broke

in. "I don't suppose ye ever heard that th' city pays policemen to catch those that commits murther? 'Ye called th' coroner and had him spoil what little clues we might o' found, an'——"

The goaded woman turned on him in fury. "The city may pay police to catch murderers," she blazed, "but if it does it's wasting its money on the likes o' you! Do you know who killed Mr. Carlin? No! Do you know who killed Mr. Harold? No! Will you find out who murdered poor, innocent Mrs. Pancoast? Don't make me laugh! You couldn't catch cold on a rainy day, let alone catch a sneaking murderer like the one which did these killings! You and your talk o' spoiled clues!" She tossed her head disdainfully. "Was I to leave the poor lady's remains laying by her own front door while you looked round for finger-prints and the like o' that? Not for all the police in Harrisonville would I——"

"*Tiens,* my friends, this is interesting, but not instructive. There is little to be gained from calling hard names, and time presses. Had you first notified the police, *Mademoiselle,* you would have rendered apprehension of the miscreants more certain, but as it is we must make the best of what we have to work with. No amount of weeping will restore spilled milk."

To Costello he added: "Let us inspect Madame Pancoast's boudoir. Perhaps we shall find something."

A BRIGHT fire burned behind the brass fender in the cheerful apartment Maria Pancoast had quit to go to her death an hour earlier; pictures, mostly family portraits, adorned the walls, the windows were gay with bright-figured chintz. A glance at the mahogany table revealed nothing. The gayly painted wastebasket contained only a few stray wisps of crumpled notepaper; the Colonial escritoire which stood between the windows was kept with spinsterish neatness; nothing like a hastily opened note or visiting-card showed on its fresh green blotter.

"*Voilà,* my friends, I think I have it!" de Grandin cried, peering into the bed of glowing coke as he crouched on hands and knees before the fireplace. "It is burned, but—careful, very careful, my friend, a strong breath may destroy it!" He motioned Costello back, took up the brazen fire-tongs and, gently as a chemist might handle an explosive mixture, lifted a tiny curl of crackling gray-black ash from the blue flames. "*Prie Dieu* she wrote in ink!" he muttered as he bore his find to the table and laid it tenderly upon the sheet of clean white paper Costello spread before him.

The parchment shades were stripped from the lamps and at Costello's order Jane, the maid, ran to the dining-room to fetch stronger electric bulbs. Meanwhile de Grandin reached into his waistcoat pocket and took out a pair of delicate steel tweezers and a collapsible-framed jeweler's loop which he inserted in his right eye.

Carefully, almost without breathing, lest the gentle current of air from lips or nostrils destroy the carbonized cardboard, he turned the blackened relic underneath the lens of his glass.

"*M—i—s—s— A—l—l,*" he spelled out slowly, then fell to studying the cone of blackened paper intently again. "No use, my friends, the printing is effaced by the fire beyond that part," he told us. "Now for the message on the card. If she used ink all is well, for the metallic pigment in it will have withstood the heat. If she wrote in pencil—we are luckless, I fear. Let us see."

For several minutes he turned the little

cone of ash beneath the lights, then with a shrug of impatience laid it on the paper, and holding one end in a gentle, steady grip with the tweezers, dipped his fingers in a tumbler and let fall a drop of water on the charred pasteboard. The burned paper trembled like a living thing in torture as the liquid touched it, and a tiny crackling rose from it. But after a moment the moisture seemed to spread through the burned fiber, rendering it a thought less brittle. Twice more he repeated the experiment, each time increasing the pressure of his tweezers. At length he succeeded in prying the cone of heat-contorted paper partly open.

"*Ah?*" he exclaimed exultantly. "It was prepared beforehand. See, she did use ink—thanks be to God!"

Again he studied the charred pasteboard and spelled out slowly: "*Ip—bo—ban—so——*"

"Name of a name; it is plain as any flagpole!" he cried. "In vain is the evidence of crime burned, my friends. We have them, we know the bait by which they lured poor Madame Pancoast to her death! You see?" He turned bright eyes on Costello and me in turn.

"Not I," I answered.

"Nor I," the Irishman confessed.

"*Mordieu,* must I then teach school to you great stupid-heads?" he asked. "Consider:

"A young woman comes to see poor Madame Pancoast, scarcely four hours after she has laid away all that remained to her of son and husband. Would *Madame* be likely to see a stranger in such circumstances? Mademoiselle Jane, the maid, thought not, and she was undoubtlessly right. But Madame Pancoast saw this visitor. For why? Because of something written on a card. Now, what could move a woman with a shattered heart to see an unknown visitor—more, to go away with her, seemingly in a fever of impatience? The answer leaps to the eye. Certainly. It is this: Fill in the missing letters of these words, and though they make but fragments of a sentence, they speak to us in trumpet-tones. Four parts of words we have, the first of which is *'lp.'* Add two letters to it, and we have *'help.' N'est-ce-pas?* But certainly. Perform the same office for the other three and we have this portion of the message: *'help—who—husband—son.'* What more is needed? Tonight came one who promised—in writing, *grâce à Dieu*—to help the stricken wife and mother bring to justice the slayer of her husband and her son! Is it to be wondered that she went with her? *Pardieu,* though she had known for certainty that the path led to the death she met tonight, she would have gone. Yes.

"Madame Pancoast"—he wheeled and faced a portrait of the murdered woman which hung upon the wall and brought his hand up in salute—"your sacrifice shall not be in vain. Although they know it not, these vile miscreants who lured you to your death have paved the way for Jules de Grandin to seek them out. I swear it!"

To us he ordered peremptorily: "Come, let us go!"

"Where?" Costello and I demanded in chorus.

"To Monsieur Dalky's, of course. I think that he can do us a favor. I know we can do him one, if it be not already too late. *Allez-vous-en!*"

4. *The Warning*

"NO, SIR, Mr. Dalky's not in," the butler answered de Grandin's impatient inquiry. "He went out about fifteen or twenty minutes ago, and——

"Really, I couldn't say, sir," the man's manner was eloquent of outraged dignity

as de Grandin demanded his employer's destination. "Mr. Dalky was not accustomed to tell me where he intended——"

"*Dix mille moustiques,* what do we care of his customs?" the Frenchman cut in. "This is of importance. We must know whither he went at once, right away——"

"I really couldn't say, sir," the butler returned imperturbably, and swung the door to.

"Listen here, young felly," Costello inserted the broad toe of his boot in the rapidly diminishing space between door and jamb and brought his broad shoulder against the panels, "d'ye see this?" He turned back the lapel of his jacket, displaying his badge. "Ye'll tell us where Dalky went, an' tell it quick, or else——"

Statement of the alternative was unnecessary. "I'll ask Mrs. Dalky, sir," the man began, but:

"Ye'll not," Costello denied. "Ye'll take us to her, an' we'll do our own askin', savvy?" The butler led us to the room where Mrs. Dalky sat beneath a reading-lamp conning the current issue of *The New Yorker.*

"A thousand pardons, *Madame,*" de Grandin apologized, "but we come in greatest haste to consult *Monsieur* your husband. It is in relation to the so strange deaths of Monsieur Pancoast and——"

"Mr. Pancoast!" Mrs. Dalky dropped her magazine and her air of slight hauteur at once. "Why, that's what Herbert went to see about."

"Ten thousand crazy monkeys!" de Grandin swore beneath his breath, then, aloud: "When? Where, if you please? It is important!"

"We were sitting here reading," the lady replied, "when the telephone rang. Some one wanted to speak with Mr. Dalky privately, concerning the murder of Mr. Pancoast and his son. It seemed, from what I overheard, that this person had stumbled on the information accidentally and wanted to consult my husband about one or two phases of the case before they went to the police. Mr. Dalky wanted him to come here, but he said they must act at once if they were to catch the murderers, so he would meet my husband at Tunlaw and Emerson Streets in twenty minutes, then they could go directly to police headquarters, and——"

"Your pardon, *Madame,* we must go!" de Grandin almost shouted, and seizing Costello with one hand and me with the other, he fairly dragged us from the room.

"Rush, hasten, fly, my friend!" he bade me. "We have perhaps five little minutes of grace. Let us make the most of it. To those Tunlaw and Emerson Streets, with all celerity, if you please!"

THE gleaming, baleful eyes of a city ambulance's red-lensed headlights bore down upon us from the opposite direction as we raced to the designated corner, and the *r-r-r-rang!* of its gong warned traffic from the road. A crowd had already begun to congregate at the curb, staring with hang-jawed wonder at something on the sidewalk.

"Jeez, Sergeant," exclaimed the patrolman who stood guard above the still figure lying on the concrete, "I never seen nothing like it. Talk about puttin' 'em on th' spot! Lookit this!" He put back the improvised shroud covering Dalky's features, and I went sick at the sight. The left side of the man's head, from brow to hair-line, was scooped away, like an apple bitten into, and from the awful, gaping wound flowed mingled blood and brain. "No need for you here, Doc," the officer added to the ambulance surgeon as the vehicle clanged to a halt and the

white-jacketed intern elbowed his way through the crowd. "What this pore sucker needs is th' morgue wagon."

"How'd it happen?" Costello asked.

"Well, sir, it was all so sudden I can't rightly tell you," the patrolman answered. "I seen this here bird standin' on th' corner, kind o' lookin' round an' pullin' out his watch every once in a while, like he had a heavy date with some one, when all of a sudden a car comes rushin' round th' corner, goin' like th' hammers o' hell, an' before I knew it, it's swung up that way through Emerson Street, and this pore feller's layin' on th' sidewalk with half his face missin'." He passed a hand meditatively across his hard-shaven chin. "It musta been th' car hit 'im," he added, "though I can't see how it could 'a' cut him up that way, but I'd 'a' swore I seen sumpin sort o' jump out o' th' winder at him as th' automobile dashed past, just th' same. I suppose I'm all wet, but——"

"By no means, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin interrupted. "What was it you saw flash from the passing car, if you please?"

"That's hard to say, sir," the officer responded. "I can say what it *looked* like, though."

"*Très bien.* Say on; we are all attention."

"Well, sir, don't think I'm a nut; but it *looked* like a sad-iron hitched onto a length o' clothesline. I'd 'a' swore some one inside th' car flung th' iron out th' winder, mashed th' pore chap in th' face with it, an' yanked it back—all in one motion, like. Course, it couldn't 'a' been, but——"

"What kind o' car wuz it?" demanded Costello.

"Looked like a taxi, sir. One o' them new, shiny black ones with a band o' red an' gold checkers runnin' round the tonneau, you know. It had more speed than any taxi I ever saw, an' it got clear away before I got a good look at it, for I was all taken up with this pore man, but——"

"All right, turn in your report when th' coroner's car comes for him," Costello ordered. "Annything ye'd like to ask, Doctor de Grandin?"

"I think not," the Frenchman answered. "But, if you please, I should like to have you put a guard in Mrs. Dalky's house. In no circumstances is any one not known to the servants to be allowed to see her, and no telephone calls whatever are to be put through to her. You will do this?"

"H'm, I'll try, sor. If th' lady objects, o' course, there's nothin' we can do, for she's not accused o' crime, an' we can't isolate her that way agin' her will; but I'll see what we can do.

"This burns me up," he added dismally. "Here this felly, whoever he is, goes an' pulls another murther off, right while we're lookin' at 'im, ye might say. It's monkeys he's makin' out o' us, nothin' less!"

"By no means," de Grandin denied. "True, he has accomplished his will, but for the purpose of his final apprehension, it is best that he seems to have the game entirely his own way. Our seeming inability to cope with him will make him bold, and boldness is akin to foolishness in a criminal. Consider: We were at fault concerning Monsieur Pancoast's murder; the murder of his son likewise gave us naught to go upon; almost while we watched he lured poor Madame Pancoast from her house and slew her, and as far as he can know, we know no more about the bait he used in her case than we knew of the other killings. Now comes Monsieur Dalky. The game seems all too easy; he thinks that he can kill at will and pass among us unsuspected and unmolested. Assuredly he will try the trick again, and when he does—*parbleu,*

the strongest pitcher comes to grief if it be taken to the well too often! Yes."

"What made ye think that Dalky'd be th' next to go?" Costello asked as we drove slowly through the quiet street to notify the widow.

"A little by-play which I chanced to notice at the funeral this afternoon," de Grandin answered. "It happened that I raised my head while the good clergyman was broadcasting endlessly, and as I did so I perceived a hand reach through the open window and drop a wad of paper at Monsieur Dalky's feet. He did not seem to notice it at first, and when he did he thrust it unread into his waistcoat pocket.

"There I was negligent, I grant you. I should have followed him and asked to see the contents of the note—for a note of some kind it was undoubtlessly. Why else should it have been dropped before him while he was at the funeral of his one-time partner? But I did not follow my intention. Although the incident intrigued me, I had more pressing business to attend to in searching out Monsieur Pancoast's antecedents that we might find some motive for his murder. It was not till I had interviewed Madame Hussé at the Bellefield Home that I learned of the former partnership between Pancoast and Dalky, and even then I did not greatly apprehend the danger to the latter; for though he was associated with the murdered man, he, at least, had never traveled to the East. But when the vengeful one slew Madame Pancoast, who was most surely innocent of any wrong, my fears for Monsieur Dalky were roused, and so we hastened to his house—too late, *hélas*."

We drove in silence a few moments, then: "What we have seen tonight confirms my suspicions almost certainly," he stated.

"Umph!" grunted Costello.

"Precisely, exactly, quite so. The chenay throwing-knife, do you know him?"

"Can't say I do."

"Very good. I do. On more than one occasion I had dodged him, and he requires artful dodging, I assure you. Yes. *Couteau de table du diable*—the devil's table knife—he has been called, and rightly so. Something like the bolo of your Filipinos it is, but with a curved blade, a blade not curved like a saber, but bent lengthwise, the point toward the hilt, so that the steel describes an arc. Sharpened on both edges like a razor—five inches across its widest part, weighted at the handle, it is the weapon of the devil—or of *Dakaits*, who are the foul fiend's half-brothers. They fling it with lightning speed and such force that it will sheer through iron—or one's skull. Then with a thin, tough cord of gut they pull it back again. Yes, it is true. Very well. Such a blade, Friend Trowbridge, hurled at a man's back would cut his spine and also cleave his lower skull. You apprehend me?"

"You mean it was a knife like that——"

"*Précisément*. No less. I did not at first identify it by the wound it made on the poor Pancoasts, but when I saw the so unfortunate Monsieur Dalky's cloven face, my memory bridged the gulf of years and bore me back to Burma—and the throwing-knives. With Pancoast's history in our minds, with these knife wounds to bear it out, the conclusion is obvious. The Oriental mind is flexible, but it is also conservative. Having started on a course of action, it will carry it through without the slightest deviation. I think we shall soon lay this miscreant by the heels, my friends."

"How?" Costello asked.

"Attend me carefully, and you shall see. Jules de Grandin has sworn an oath to poor, dead Madame Pancoast, and Jules de Grandin is no oath-breaker. By no means. No."

THE shock was almost more than Mrs. Dalky could bear. Both de Grandin and I were busy for upward of an hour with sedatives and soothing words. Meanwhile her condition simplified the Frenchman's program, for a policewoman who also held a nurse's license was installed beside her bed with orders to turn away all callers, and a plain-clothes man was posted in the hall.

"And now, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin told the butler, "you will please get me at once the formal coat and waistcoat Monsieur Dalky wore to the Pancoast funeral this afternoon. Hasten; my time is short, and my temper shorter!"

Feverishly he turned the dead man's pockets out. In the lower left waistcoat pocket was a tiny wad of crumpled rice-paper, the kind of thin, gray-white stuff which Eastern merchandise is wrapped in. Across it, roughly scrawled in red was the grotesque figure of a pointing man, a queer-looking figure in tight trousers and a conical cap, pointing with clenched fists at a row of smaller figurines. Obviously three of the smaller characters were men, their bifurcated garments proclaimed as much. Two more, judging by the crudely pictured skirts, were women. Two of the male figures had toppled over, the third and the two women stood erect.

"*Ha,* the implication here is plain. You see it?" de Grandin asked excitedly. "It was a warning, though the poor Dalky knew it not, apparently. Observe"—he tapped the two prone figures with his finger tip—"here lie the Pancoasts, *père et fils.* There, ready for the sacrifice is Madame Pancoast, and here is Monsieur Dalky, the sole remaining man. The last one in the group, the final woman, is who? Who but Madame Dalky, my friends? All, all are designed to die, and two are already dead, according to this drawing. Yes." He glared across the room as though in challenge to an invisible personage. "*Ha,* Monsieur Murderer, you may propose, but Jules de Grandin will dispose of this case and of you. I damn think I shall take you in your own trap and call your vengeance down on your own head. May Satan serve me stewed with parsley if I do not so!"

5. *Allura*

"SURE, it was an elegant job Coroner Martin did on Misther Dalky," Sergeant Costello commented as he stretched his feet to the fire of birch logs crackling on my study hearth and drew appreciatively at the cigar de Grandin gave him. "Were ye mindin' th' way he'd patched th' pore gentleman's face up so ye'd never notice how th' haythen murtherer done 'im in, Doctor Trowbridge, sor?"

I nodded. "Martin's a clever man at demisurgery," I answered, "one of the best I've ever seen, and——"

"Excuse me, sor," Nora McGinnis, who is nominally my cook and household factotum, but who actually rules both my house and me with a hand of iron, appeared in the study doorway, "there's a lady in th' consultin'-room askin' to see Doctor de Grandin."

"Me?" the Frenchman asked. "You are sure? I do not practise medicine here; it must be Doctor Trowbridge whom she——"

"Th' divil a bit," Nora contradicted. "Sure, she's askin' fer th' little gentleman wid light hair an' a waxed mustache, an' Doctor Trowbridge has naither light

nor anny other kind o' hair, nor does he wax his mustache."

"You win, *ma belle,* certainly it is I," de Grandin answered with a laugh and rose to follow her.

A moment later he rejoined us, walking softly as a cat, his little round blue eyes alight with excitement. "Trowbridge, Costello, my friends," he whispered almost soundlessly, "come; come quietly, *comme une souris,* and see who is within. Adhere your ears to the keyhole, my friends, and likewise your eyes; I would that you should hear, as well as see!" He turned and left us and, as quietly as we could, we followed through the passage.

The writing-lamp burned on my office desk, its emerald shade picking out a spot of glowing green in the shadows of the room, and de Grandin moved it deftly so that its light fell full upon the visitor, yet left his face in dusk. At the door between the surgery and consulting-room we paused and watched the tableau. Despite myself I started as my eyes rested on the face turned toward the Frenchman.

Devoid of rouge or natural coloring, save for the glowing carmine of the painted lips, the face was pale as death's own self and the texture of the fine white skin seemed more that of a Dresden blond than a brunette, although the hair beneath the modishly small hat was almost basalt-black. The nose was delicate, with slender nostrils that seemed to palpitate above the crimson lips. The face possessed a strange, compelling charm, its ivory pallor enhanced by the shadow of the long, silken lashes that lay against the cheeks, half veiling, half revealing purple eyes which slanted downward at the outer corners, giving the countenance a quaint, pathetic look. "It's she!" I murmured, forgetting that Costello could not understand, since he had never looked on her before. But I recognized her instantly. When first I saw her, she had walked with Harold Pancoast an hour or less before he met his tragic death.

"It is my uncle, sir," she told de Grandin as we halted at the door. "He suffers from an obscure disease he contracted in the Orient years ago. The attacks are more violent at changes of the season—spring and autumn always affect him—and at present he's suffering acutely. We've had several doctors already, but none of them seems to understand the case. Then we heard of you." She folded her slender pale hands in her lap and looked placidly at him, and it seemed to me there was an odd expression in her gaze, like that of a person just aroused and still heavy with sleep, or one suffering from a dose of some narcotic drug.

The little Frenchman twisted the waxed tips of his diminutive blond mustache, obviously much pleased. "How was it they bade you come to me, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"We heard—my uncle heard, that is—that you were a great traveler and had studied in the clinics of the East. He thought if any one could give him relief it would be you." There was a queer, indefinable quality to her speech, her words were short, close-clipped, and seemed to stand out individually, as though each were the expression of a separate thought, and her semivowels and aspirates seemed insufficiently stressed.

For a long moment de Grandin studied her, and I thought I saw a look of wondering speculation in his face as he gazed directly into her luminous dark-blue eyes. Then: "Very well, *Mademoiselle,* I will come," he assented. "Do but wait a moment while I write out this prescription——" he took a pad of notepaper from the corner of the blotter and drew it toward him.

Crash! The atmosphere seemed shat-

tered by the detonation and the room was plunged in sudden darkness.

I leaped forward, but a sharp, warning hiss from de Grandin stopped me in my tracks, and next instant I felt his little hand against my shoulder, pushing me insistently back to my hiding-place. Hardly had I regained the shelter of the door when the lights in the ceiling chandelier snapped on, flooding the room with brightness. Amazement almost froze me as I looked.

Calm and unmoved as a graven image the girl sat in her chair, her mild, impersonal gaze still fixed on Jules de Grandin. No change in expression or attitude had taken place, though the desk lamp lay shattered on the floor, its shade and bulbs smashed into a thousand fragments.

"Right away, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin remarked, as though he also were unaware of any untoward happening. "Come, let us go."

A long, black taxicab, its tonneau banded with squares of alternate gold and red, stood waiting at the curb before my door. The engine must have been running all the while, for de Grandin and the girl had hardly entered before it was away, traveling at a furious pace.

"Howly Moses, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, can't ye tell me what it's all about?" Costello asked as we re-entered the consulting-room and gazed upon the havoc.

"I'm afraid not," I returned, "but it looks as though a twenty-dollar lamp has been ruined, and——" I stopped, gazing at the two white spots upon my green desk-blotter. One was a woman's visiting-card, engraved in neat block letters:

MISS ALLURA BATA

The other was a scribbled note from Jules de Grandin:

"Friend Trowbridge:

"In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, and I am not caught napping by their ruse. I think the murderer suspects I am too hot upon his trail, and has decided to dispose of me; but his chances of success are small. Await me. I shall return.

"J. DE G."

"Lord knows I hope his confidence is justified," I exclaimed fervently. The thought of my little friend entering the lair of the pitiless killer appalled me.

"Wurra, if I'd 'a' known it, he'd never gone off wid her unless I went along," Costello added. "He's a good little divil, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, an' if they do 'im injury, I'll——"

"*Merci,* my friend, you are most complimentary," de Grandin's laughing voice came from the doorway. "You did think I had the chance of the sparrow in the cat's mouth, *hein? Eh bien,* I fear this sparrow proved a highly indigestible morsel, in that event. Yes.

"If by any chance you should go to a corner not so far away, my friend, you will find there a taxicab in a most deplorable state of disrepair. It is not healthy for the chauffeur to try conclusions with a tree, however powerful his motor may be. As for that one——" he paused, and there was something more of grimness than merriment in his smile.

"Where is he?" Costello asked. "If he tried any monkey-business——"

"*Tiens,* he surely did," de Grandin interrupted, "but with less success than a monkey would have had, I think. As for his present whereabouts"—he raised his narrow shoulders in an expressive shrug—"let us be charitable and say he is in heaven, although I fear that would be too optimistic. Perhaps I should have waited, but I had but little time to exercise my judgment, and so I acted quickly. I did not like the way he put speed to his motor the moment we had entered it, and as he was increasing the distance between you and me with each turn of his wheels, I acted on an impulse and struck him on the head. I struck him very hard, I fear,

and struck him with a blackjack. It seemed to bother him considerably, for he lost control of his wheel immediately and ran into a tree. The vehicle stopped suddenly, but he continued on. The windshield intervened, but he continued on his way. Yes. He was a most unpleasant sight when last I looked at him.

"It took but half my eye," he continued, "to tell me the fellow was a foreigner, an Indian or Burmese. The trap was evidently well oiled, but so was I. *Alors*, I did escape.

"Eh bien, they are clever, those ones. It was a taxicab I entered, a new and pretty taxicab with lines of red and gold squares round its tonneau. The wrecked car from which I crawled a few minutes later had no such marks. No. By a device easily controlled from the driver's cab a shutter, varnished black to match the body of the car, could be instantly raised over the red and golden checkers, thus transforming what was patently a taxicab into a sumptuous private limousine. Had I not come back, you might have searched long for the taxi I was last seen in, but your search would have been in vain. It was a taxi, so the maid thought, which bore poor Madame Pancoast to her death, and it was a taxi, according to the officer, from which the death-knife was hurled at Monsieur Dalky, but neither of them could identify it accurately, and if instant chase had been given in either instance, the vehicle could have changed its identity almost while the pursuers watched, and gotten clean away. A clever scheme, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"Well, sor, I'll be——" began Costello.

"Where's the girl?" I interrupted.

He looked at us with something like wonder in his eyes. "Do you recall how she sat stone-still, and seemed to notice not at all when I hurled your desk-lamp to the floor, and plunged the room in darkness?" he asked irrelevantly. "You saw that, for all she seemed to notice, nothing had happened, and that she took up the conversation where we left off when I turned on the lights again?"

"Yes, but where *is*——"

"Parbleu, you have as yet seen nothing, or at the most, but very little," he returned. "Come."

The girl sat calmly on the sofa in the study, her lovely, violet eyes staring with bovine placidity into the fire.

The little Frenchman tiptoed in and took up his position before her. *"Mademoiselle?"* he murmured questioningly.

"Doctor de Grandin?" she asked, turning her odd, almost sightless gaze on him.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle."*

"I've come to see you about my uncle He suffers from an obscure disease he contracted in the Orient years ago. The attacks are most violent at changes of the season—spring and autumn always affect him—and at present he is suffering acutely. We've had several doctors already, but none of them seems to understand the case. Then we heard of you."

Sergeant Costello and I looked at her, then at each other in mute astonishment. Obviously unaware that she had seen him before, the girl had stated her errand in the precise words employed in the consulting-room not half an hour earlier.

The Frenchman looked at me above her head and his lips formed a single soundless word: "Morphine."

I regarded him questioningly a moment, and he repeated the silent disyllable, holding his hand beside his leg and going through the motion of making an injection at the same time, then glancing significantly at the girl.

I nodded understandingly at last and went to fetch the drug. She seemed not

to be aware of what transpired as I took a fold of skin between my thumb and finger, pinched it lightly, and thrust the needle in.

"We heard—my uncle heard, that is—that you were a great traveler and had studied in the clinics of the East," she was telling de Grandin as I shot the plunger home, and still repeating her message parrotwise, word for word as she had delivered it before, she fell asleep beneath the power of three-quarters of a grain of alkaloid of *somniferum*.

6. *The Death-Dealer*

"AND now, my excellent one," de Grandin told Costello as he and I returned from putting the unconscious girl to bed, "I would that you telephone headquarters and have them send us two good men and a *chien de police* without delay. We shall need them, I damn think, and that without much waiting, for the spider will be restless when the fly comes not, and will undoubtlessly be seeking explanations here."

"Be dad, sor, if he comes here lookin' for flies he'll find a flock o' horseflies, an' th' kind that can't be fooled, at that!" Costello answered with a grin as he picked up the 'phone.

"NOW, *mes amis*, you can not be too careful," de Grandin warned the two patrolmen who answered Costello's summons. "This is a vicious one we deal with, and a clever one, as well. He thinks no more of murder than you or I consider the extermination of a bothersome gnat, and he is also quick and subtle. Yes. It is late for any one to call. Should a visitor mount the steps, one of you inquire his business, but let the other keep well hidden and have his pistol ready. At the first hostile move you shoot, and shoot to hit. Remember, he has already killed three men and a defenseless woman. No mercy is deserved by such as he."

The officers nodded understandingly, and we disposed our forces for defense. Costello, de Grandin and I were to join the policemen alternately on the outside watch, relieving each other every hour. The two remaining in the house were to stay in the room where the girl Allura lay in drugged sleep, for the Frenchman had a theory the killer would attempt to find her if he managed to elude the guard outside. "She who was bait for us will now be bait for him," he stated as he concluded arrangements. "Let us proceed, my friends, and remember what I said, let no false notions of the preciousness of life delay your hands—*he* is troubled with no such scruples, I assure you."

Midnight passed and one o'clock arrived, still no indications of the visitant's approach. Costello had gone to join the outside guard, I lounged and yawned in the armchair by the bed where Allura lay, de Grandin lighted cigarette from cigarette, beat a devil's tattoo on his chair-arm and gazed impatiently at his watch from time to time.

"I'm afraid it's no use, old chap," I told him. "This fellow probably took fright when his messenger and chauffeur failed to return—he's very likely putting as much distance between himself and us as possible this very minute. If——"

Bang! the thunderous detonation drowned my voice as an explosion, almost under our window, shook the air. I leaped to my feet with a cry, but:

"Not the window, my friend—keep away, it is death!" de Grandin warned, seizing me by the arm and dragging me back. "This way—it is safest!"

As we raced downstairs the sharp, staccato discharge of a revolver sounded,

followed by a mocking laugh. The Frenchman opened the front door, and dropping to his hands and knees glanced out into the night. Another pistol shot, followed by a cry of pain, sounded from the farther end of the yard; then the deep, ferocious baying of the police dog and a crashing in the rhododendron bushes told us contact of some sort had been made with the enemy.

"D'je get hit, Clancy?" called one of the policemen, charging across the lawn.

"Never mind me, git *him!*" the other cried, and his mate rushed toward the thicket where the savage dog was worrying something. A nightstick flashed twice in the rays of a street lamp, and two dull, heavy thuds told us the locust club struck flesh both times.

"Here he is, Sergeant!" the patrolman called. "Shall I bring 'im in?"

"Sure, let's have a look at him," Costello answered. "Are ye hurt bad, Clancy?"

"Not much, sir," the other answered. "He flang a knife or sumpin at me, but Ludendorff jumped 'im so quick it spoilt his aim. I could do with a bit o' bandage, though."

While Costello and the uninjured policeman dragged the infuriated dog from the unconscious man and prepared to bring him into the house, de Grandin and I assisted Clancy to the surgery. He was bleeding profusely from a long, crescent-shaped incised wound in the right shoulder, but the injury was superficial, and a first-aid pack of boric and salicylic acid held in place by a figure-eight bandage quickly reduced the hemorrhage.

"I'll say he's cute, sir," Clancy commented as de Grandin deftly pinned the muslin bandage into place. "We none o' us suspected he was anywheres around—he must 'a' walked on his hands, for he surely didn't make no footsteps we could hear—when all of a sudden we heard sumpin go *bang!* alongside th' house, an' a flare o' fire like a Fourth o' July rocket went up. I yanks out me gun an' fires, like you told us, an' then some one laughs at me, right behind me back, an' sumpin comes whizzin' through th' air like a little airplane an' I feels me shoulder getting numb an' blood a-runnin' down me arm.

"Lucky thing for me old Ludendorff was with me. The son-of-a-gun could make a monkey out o' me, flingin' his contact bomb past me an' drawin' me out in th' open with me back turned to 'im, so's he could fling his knife into me, but he couldn't fool th' dawg. No, sir! He smelt th' feller forty feet away an' made a bee-line for him, draggin' 'im down before you could say Jack Robinson."

The Frenchman nodded. "You were indeed most fortunate," he agreed. "In a few minutes the ambulance will come, and you may go. Meantime—you will?"

"I'm tellin' th' cock-eyed world I will!" Officer Clancy responded as de Grandin moved the brandy bottle and a glass toward him. "Say, Doc, they can cut me up every night o' th' week, if I git this kind o' medicine afterward!"

"*Mon vieux,* your comrade waits in the next room," de Grandin told the other officer. "He is wounded but happy, and I suspect you would like to join him——" he glanced invitingly through the opened door, and as the officer beheld the treatment Clancy was taking for his hurt, he nearly overset the furniture in hasty exit.

"Now, my friends—to business," the Frenchman cried as he closed the surgery door on the policemen and turned to eye our prisoner.

I HELD a bottle of sal volatile under the man's nose, and in a moment a twitching of the nostrils and fluttering of lids told us he was coming round. He

clutched both chair-arms and half heaved himself upright, but:

"Slowly, my friend; when your time comes to depart, you will not go alone," de Grandin ordered, digging the muzzle of his pistol into the captive's ribs. "Be seated, rest yourself, and give us information which we much desire, if you please."

"Yes, an' remember annything ye say may be used agin ye at yer trial," Costello added officially.

"Pains of a dyspeptic Billy-goat! Must you always spoil things?" de Grandin snapped, but:

"It's quite all right, sir, the game seems played, and I appear to have lost," the prisoner interrupted. "What is it you would like to know?"

He was a queer figure, one of the queerest I had ever seen. A greatcoat of plum-colored cloth, collared and cuffed with kolinsky, covered him from throat to knees, and beneath the garment his massive legs, arrayed in light gray trousers, stuck forward woodenly, as though his joints were stiff. He was big, huge; wide of shoulder, deep of chest and almost obscenely gross of abdomen. His head was oversized, even for his great body, and nearly round, with out-jutting, sail-like ears. Somehow, his face reminded me of one of those old Japanese terror-masks, mahogany-colored, mustached with badger hair, and snarling malignantly. A stubble of short, gray hair covered his scalp, the fierce gray mustache above his mouth was stiff as bristles from a scrubbing-brush, and the smile he turned on Jules de Grandin was frozen cruelty warmed by no slightest touch of human pity, while terrible, malignant keenness lurked in his narrow, onyx-black eyes. A single glance at him convinced me that the ruthless murderer of four innocent people was before us, and that his trail of murder would be ended only with his further inability to kill. He waved a hand, loosely, wagging it from the wrist as though it were attached to his forearm by a well-oiled hinge, and I caught the gleam of a magnificent octagonal emerald—a gem worth an emperor's ransom—on his right forefinger. "What was it you wished to know?" he repeated. Then: "May I smoke?"

The Frenchman nodded assent, but kept the prisoner covered with his weapon until sure he meant to draw nothing more deadly than a silver cigarette case from his pocket.

"Begin at the beginning, if you please, *Monsieur,*" he bade. "We know how you did slay Monsieur Pancoast and his poor son, and how you murdered his defenseless widow, also the poor Monsieur Dalky, but *why,* we ask to know. For why should four people you had never seen be victims of your lust for killing? Speak quickly; we have not long to wait."

The prisoner smiled, and once again I felt the chills run down my back at sight of the grimace.

"East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet."

he quoted ironically. "I suppose it's no use attempting to make you share my point of view?"

"That depends on what your viewpoint is," de Grandin answered. "You killed them—why?"

"Because they deserved it, richly," the other returned calmly. "Listen to this charming little story, if you can spare the time:

"I was born in Mangadone. My father was a *chetty*—they call them *bania* in India. A money-lender—usurer—in fine. You know the breed; unsavory lot they are, extracting thirty and forty per cent on loans and keeping whole generations in their debt. Yes, my father was one of them.

"He was Indian by birth, but took up trade in Burma, and flourished at it like the proverbial green bay tree. His ideas for me, though, were different from the usual Indian's. He wanted me to be a *burra sahib*—a 'somebody', as you say. So when the time came he packed me off to England and college to study Shakespeare and the musical glasses, but particularly law and finance. I came back a licensed barrister and with a master's degree in economics.

"But"—again his evil smile moved across his features—"I came back to a desolated home, as well. My father had a daughter by a second wife, a lovely little thing called Mumtaj, meaning moonflower. He cherished her, was rather more fond of her than the average benighted Indian is of his girl-children, and because of the wealth he had amassed, looked forward to a brilliant match for her.

" 'Man proposes but God disposes,' it has been said, you know. In this case it was the White Man's God, through one of his accredited ministers, who disposed. In the local American mission was an earnest young *sahib* known as the Reverend Carlin Pancoast, a personable young man who wrestled mightily with Satan, and made astonishing progress at it. My father was liberal-minded; he saw much good in the ways of the *sahiblog,* believing that our ancient customs were outmoded; so it was not difficult to induce him to send my little sister Moonflower to the mission school.

"But though he was progressive, my father still adhered to some of the old ways. For instance, he kept the bulk of his wealth in precious metals and jewels, and much of it in gold and silver currency—this last was necessary in order to have ready cash for borrowers, you see. So it was not very difficult for Pancoast *Thakin* and my sister to lay hands on gold and jewels amounting to three lakhs of rupees—about a hundred thousand dollars—quite a respectable little sum, and virtually every farthing my father had.

"They fled to 'China, 'cross the bay,' where no one was too inquisitive and British extradition would not reach, except in the larger cities. Then they went inland and to the sea by boat. At Shanghai they parted. It was impossible for a *sahib,* especially an American preacher-*sahib,* to take a black girl home with him as wife. But it was not at all embarrassing for him to take home her father's money, which she had stolen for him, plus my sister's *purchase price.*

"What? Oh, dear me, yes. He sold her. She was 'damaged goods,' of course, but proprietors of the floating brothels that ply the China coasts and rivers aren't over-particular concerning the kind of woman-flesh they buy, provided the price is low enough. So the Reverend Pancoast *Sahib* was rid of an embarrassing incumbrance, and in a little cash to boot by the deal. Shrewd businessmen, these Yankees.

"My father was all for prosecuting in the *sahibs'* way, but I had other plans. A few odd bits of precious metals were dug up here and there—literally dug up, gentlemen, for Mother Earth is Mother India's most common safe deposit vault—and with these we began our business life all over again. I profited by what I'd learned in England, and we prospered from the start. In fifteen years we were far wealthier than when the Reverend Carlin Pancoast eloped with my father's daughter and fortune.

"But as the Chinese say, 'we had lost face'—the memory of the insult put on us by the missionary still rankled, and I began to train myself to wipe it out. From fakirs I learned the arts of hypnotism and jugglery, and from *Dakaits* whom I hired at fabulous prices I ac-

quired perfect skill at handling the throwing-knife. Indeed, there was hardly a *budmash* in all lower Burma more expert in the murderer's trade than I when I had completed my training.

"Then I came here. Before the bloody altar of Durga—you know her as Kali, goddess of the *thags*—I took an oath that Pancoast and all his tribe should perish at my hands, and that every one who had profited by what he stole from my father should also die.

"And—I can't expect you to appreciate this subtlety—I brought along a very useful tool in addition to my knives. I called her Allura. Not bad, eh? She certainly possessed allure, if nothing else.

"I found her in a London slum, a miserable, undernourished brat without known father and with a gin-soaked female swine for mother. I bought her for thirty shillings, and could have had her for half that, except it pleased me to make sure her dam would drink herself to death, and so I gave her more cash than she had ever seen at one time for the child.

"I almost repented of my bargain at first, for the child, though beautiful according to Western standards, was very meagerly endowed with brains, almost a half-wit, in fact. But afterward I thanked whatever gods may be that it was so.

"Her simplicity adapted her ideally to my plan, and I began to practise systematically to kill what little mind she had, substituting my own will for it. The scheme worked perfectly. Before she had reached her twelfth year she was nothing but a living robot—a mechanism with no mind at all, but perfectly responsive to my lightest wish. With only animal instinct to guide her to the simplest vital acts, she would perform any task I set her to, provided I explained in detail just what she was to do. I've sent her on a five-hundred-mile journey, had her buy a particular article in a particular shop, and return with it, as if she were an intelligent being; then, when the task was done, she lapsed once more into idiocy, for she has become a mere idiot whenever the support of my will is withdrawn.

"It was rare sport to send her to be made love to by Pancoast's cub. The silly moon-calf fell heels over head in love with her at sight, and every day I made her rehearse everything he said—she did it with the fidelity of a gramophone—and told her what to say and do at their next meeting. When I had disposed of his father I had Allura bring the son to a secluded part of the campus and—how is it you say in French, Doctor de Grandin? Ah, yes, there I administered the *coup de grâce*. It was really droll. She didn't even notice when I cut him down, just stood there, looking at the spot where he had stood, and saying, 'Poor Harold; dear Harold; I'm so sorry, dear!'

"She was useful in getting Pancoast's widow out of the house and into my reach, too.

"Dalky I handled on my own, using the telephone in approved American fashion to 'put him on the spot,' as your gangsters so quaintly phrase it.

"Your activities were becoming annoying, though, Doctor de Grandin, so I reluctantly decided to eliminate you. Tell me, how did you suspect my trap? Did Allura fail? She never did before."

"I fear you underestimated my ability to grasp the Oriental viewpoint, my friend," de Grandin answered dryly. "Besides, although it had been burned, I rescued Mademoiselle Allura's card from Madame Pancoast's fire, and read the message on it. That, and the warning we found in Monsieur Dalky's waistcoat pocket—I saw it thrown through the window to him at the Pancoast funeral—

these gave me the necessary clues. Now, if you have no more to say, let us be going. The Harrisonville *gendarmerie* will be delighted to provide you entertainment, I assure you."

"A final cigarette?" the prisoner asked, selecting one of the long, ivory-tipped paper tubes from his case with nice precision.

"*Mais oui,* of course," de Grandin agreed, and held his flaming lighter forward.

"I fear you *do* underestimate the Oriental mind, after all, de Grandin," the prisoner laughed, and thrust half the cigarette into his mouth, then bit it viciously.

"*Mille diables,* he has tricked us!" the Frenchman cried as a strong odor of peach kernels flooded the atmosphere and the captive lurched forward spasmodically, then fell back in his chair with gaping mouth and staring, death-glazed eyes. "He was clever, that one. All camouflaged within his cigarette he had a sac of hydrocyanic acid. Less than one grain produces almost instant death; he had at least ten times that amount ready for emergency.

"*Eh bien,* my friend," he turned to Costello with a philosophical shrug, "it will save the state the expense of a trial and of electric current to put him to death. Perhaps it is better so. Who knows?"

"What about the girl, Allura?" I asked.

He pondered a moment, then: "I hope he was mistaken," he returned. "If she could be made intelligent by hypnotism, as he said, there is a chance her seeming idiocy may be entirely cured by psychotherapy. It is worth the trial, at all events. Tomorrow we shall begin experiments.

"Meantime, I go."

"Where?" Costello and I asked together.

"Where?" he echoed, as though surprized at our stupidity. "Where but to see if those so thirsty gentlemen of the police have left one drink of brandy in the bottle for Jules de Grandin, *pardieu!*"

Great Ashtoreth

By **FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.**

The priests decreed that Ashtoreth should die,
And to the hills they bore her gilded throne;
And then for bread they gave to her a stone,
And pointed to the rock where she must lie.

Then quickly to the town they sped in glee,
And shut the gates and to the people said:
"Great Ashtoreth the Sorceress is dead,
Great Ashtoreth is dead eternally."

But one by one the young men stole away,
And sought the hills and never more were seen:
And one by one the priests grew old and lean,
And there was wailing in the streets alway.

The Portal to Power

by GREYE LA SPINA

"Behold the virgin priestess!"

The Story Thus Far

DR. PEABODY, taking to California a mysterious talisman entrusted him by a reputed witch on her death-bed, accepts the apropos invitation of Job Scudder, airship magnate, to fly west. He finds that Quint, his recently discharged employe, has been taken on the "Queen" as mechanic, and foresees trouble, since Quint is a secret emissary of certain Initiates who wish to gain possession of the talisman. Leda, Scudder's pretty niece, appears deeply disturbed at the presence of Henry Winch, secretary to a guest on the "Queen."

CHAPTER 7

FOUR o'clock Sunday afternoon.

Doctor Peabody gazed out of the plate-glass windows of the drawing-room restlessly. That nervous gesture of pushing his spectacles higher on his aristocratic nose was repeated frequently. Each time Job's voice rose a little higher than Leda's, in the pinochle game they were playing at the other end of the room, the doctor jumped as if he were a criminal who suddenly felt the hand of justice on his shrinking shoulder.

"This is fearful!" he soliloquized, tracing the shape of the talisman in his vest pocket with a casual hand but betraying his anxiety by a swift glance about the room to see if he were being observed. "It will be morning before we can disembark. If the Head of the Circle of Light isn't easy to find, I shall certainly wish I hadn't undertaken old Hannah's dying wish. There's something sinister about that accident to Job's mechanic. How much did Quint have to do with it, I wonder?"

This was an uncharitable thought and the doctor realized it. Nevertheless, he told himself that he wouldn't put it past Quint to gain his end by any means that were handy. This conclusion pointed out an unpleasant future inference which the doctor would far rather not have had to consider.

At this point of his cogitations, he leaned forward somewhat startled, to survey the landscape beneath the "Queen." It seemed as if the mountain tops were flying upward to meet the great Super-flex. . . . What could be the matter?

Why, the ship was dropping—dropping so rapidly that it seemed as if in another ten minutes they would strike the great purple mountains of Colorado that were heaped beneath them on either side of the rushing river.

"Job! Come here!"

The insistence in the old doctor's voice countenanced no denial. The magnate put down his cards and with a murmured apology to Leda joined his friend.

"Look!" exclaimed the doctor, and pointed with growing apprehension.

"My God!" ejaculated Job, and then checked himself shamedly. "I'll see Larry immediately, John. Don't be disturbed. He must be making a landing for some good reason. We can trust Larry," and he went hastily toward the door leading to the pilot's quarters.

Job rattled the handle in vain, shouting, although he knew no sound of his cries could possibly reach Larry's ears over the roar of the motors. Even as he turned away in consternation, Leda's hand was on his arm, her fingers digging into the flesh.

"Uncle! We're dropping awfully fast."

"Larry must know what he's about, my dear," reassured her uncle.

"But why are we coming down among these mountains? Sir Hubert is scared almost into fits," she added, and laughed, red lips curling. "He's fit to be tied."

As she spoke, Sir Hubert burst into the drawing-room and rushed toward them, his monocle swinging from its black ribbon.

"We're falling! We're going to be killed!" wailed he. "Why did I ever come?"

"That's what I'd like to know, too," murmured Leda sarcastically.

"I told 'im I didn't like the idea, I did!" moaned he.

As if her curiosity had to be satisfied, no matter if the skies fell, the girl demanded sharply: "Whose idea was it, coming on this trip? Yours, or your secretary's?"

"Why should he want to come on this bloody ship?" cried the unhappy Sir Hubert unheedingly. "Nothing but bad luck since we came. That girl Gemma, even——" and then he suddenly checked himself, choked back the remainder of his observations, caught at his monocle and pushed it into place, with a muttered, "Excuse me, Miss Scudder. I'm that nervous, I could——"

Whatever it was that Sir Hubert could have done, he certainly was able to scream like a woman. Leda, catching at the wall to steady herself against the repeated jarrings that signified a most undignified landing on the part of the Super-flex, felt pity for this young man who was so terrified that he could only stand there and shriek.

"Don't be frightened!" exclaimed a deep voice, and the door of the pilot house opened.

Leda stared. It was the new mechanic, and his manner was sufficiently respectful to aid her in regaining poise.

"What's the trouble, Quint?" she inquired anxiously.

"The pilot fainted, Miss Scudder. I took the stick myself, and thought it best to land on a plateau I—I knew about, as one of the motors also seemed to be missing badly," explained the mechanic.

Job Scudder, who had been thrown to the floor by the shock of the forced landing, got to his feet and regarded the

mechanic with anything but a trustful expression.

"Larry Weaver fainted?" said he incredulously. "I'll just take a look at him. Leda, call John, will you."

He would have pushed past Quint into the pilot house but the younger man interposed his muscular body.

"I'd better bring him into the outside air," said he. "I think he'll be better lying down, in the air."

Without further preamble, he leaned over, picked up the supine form of Larry Weaver as if that solidly built young man were a mere straw, and strode down the passage, opened the door, and went out.

His expression astonished and half angry, Job Scudder followed, with a beckoning jerk of his head at the doctor. Leda, running after them, paused at the sitting-room, for the secretary was near the door, Whiskers on the leash.

"Whatever's happened?" inquired Henry Winch tersely and unceremoniously.

"Our pilot fainted," answered the girl briefly. "The mechanic has carried him outside."

"Then we'll be here for five or ten minutes. I'll give the dog a bit of an airing," and with that the secretary followed Leda outside onto a broad plateau, the delighted dog plunging, bounding, pulling at the leash.

On its mistress's shoulder the marmoset chattered querulously, small nose wrinkled in derision at the playful Airedale.

DOCTOR PEABODY got on his knees beside the unconscious pilot. After a moment, he turned a strange look upward at his friend.

"There's something wrong here," he pronounced. "This man's been chloroformed. How is it that nobody smelled it? Where is that chap Quint? He's up to mischief."

Leda gave a cry of anger and astonishment.

"Look! Look!"

As they turned their attention from the unconscious man at their feet, they saw Gemma and Sir Hubert rush wildly out of the airship and toward them.

"Now what?" demanded the doctor of no one in particular.

"Gemma! What's the matter? Are you crazy?" That was Leda, provoked into open rebuke by the maid's frantic appearance.

"He drove us out with a pistol," Gemma cried.

"Sir Hubert!" exclaimed Henry Winch and actually shook his employer by the arm in an endeavor to make the young nobleman regain his self-possession. "Sir Hubert!"

"Look!"

"Oh, look!"

"Look at the 'Queen'!"

"He's stealing the 'Queen'!"

It was a chorus that rose from the party on the plateau. For as they looked, the Super-flex rose swiftly, and with a graceful soaring swoop swept upward and then dropped rapidly down over the river canyon until she was lost to sight between the mighty walls of rock that reared themselves on either side of the rushing torrent of the Colorado.

Henry Winch was the first to recover equanimity. He moved unobtrusively in the direction of Leda Scudder, his eyes upon her with an anxious expression of solicitude. She met his gaze and angry color rose on her cheeks. Her lips tightened. She turned from him with deliberate insolence.

As she moved, the marmoset gave a shrill scream and flung itself from her shoulder onto the Airedale's back, where

it clung, digging small pointed fingers into the dog's rough hair.

Whiskers, taken by surprize, tried to roll over to rid himself of his unwelcome rider, but Suki, scrambling with agility from one side to the other, managed to retain her position. The leash was jerked from Henry Winch's hand as the dog gave that convulsive plunge, and finding himself unrestrained Whiskers started at full speed across the plateau, unmindful of the secretary's summoning whistles.

"Oh, Suki'll be killed! Poor little thing, she'll be killed!"

"When I catch that dog!" threatened the secretary fiercely, and started running after the speeding Whiskers.

Leda, forgetting her animosity in her fear for the tiny monkey's safety, hurried behind him.

IT TOOK some time to restore Larry Weaver to consciousness, but with the first glimmering of it he tried to stagger to his feet.

"Scoundrel!" groaned Larry thickly. "That scoundrel!"

"Take it easy, my boy," warned the old doctor. "We probably know almost as much as you about the matter," he informed the disturbed pilot dryly. "The scamp has stolen the Super-flex and left us stranded, Lord knows where."

"Must be the Sangre de Cristo range," Job Scudder declared. "We've flown this way before, although I don't remember this exact spot." He turned to look about him. "If ever I manage to lay hands on that scallawag, I'll wring his neck for him!" promised the airplane magnate with considerable warmth.

"Perhaps he's only trying out the motors," suggested Sir Hubert, his countenance still a pasty color. His eyes were downcast, as if his unmanly display of fear had left him ashamed.

"That's likely," snorted Gemma scornfully. "Why did he drive us out at the point of a pistol?" Then her eyes roved hither and thither. "Where is my *padrona?*" she cried out in amazement.

"Leda! Leda! Why, John, she was here a minute ago. Leda!"

"She and my—my secretary ran after the dog," contributed Sir Hubert, pinching the end of his sharp nose nervously.

Through his spectacles the old doctor peered in every direction, pushing them up on his nose more than once and scowling as if to concentrate his gaze in the search.

"What in the world has become of them?" Job Scudder demanded in a voice sharply querulous with alarm and sudden anxiety. "Leda! Leda!" he shouted.

No answer came save the broken echoes of his call. The old magnate turned to meet the pitying gaze of his friend.

"John, what can have happened to her?"

"She must be beyond sound of your voice," murmured the doctor.

"But where? Where?"

"I'll find her!" exclaimed the Italian girl fiercely, striking her breast with one clenched fist. "Come along, you big coward, and help!"

This remark, addressed to Sir Hubert, nearly paralyzed the two older men with amazement. The doctor stared first at Gemma, then at Job, then at Sir Hubert. The latter's high color showed that the girl's words had struck home.

"Come along, you!" commanded Gemma, and caught at Sir Hubert's arm so that he was obliged either to jerk away from her or accompany her. He chose the latter alternative.

"Come, old friend," urged the doctor, his hand on Job's shoulder. "We'll follow them. Leda must be somewhere

around. And she had young Winch along, and the dog. Young Winch seemed a manly chap."

"He was. He is," commented the magnate. "He is—you see——" and he checked himself.

"She ran this way, where the high rocks rise at the edge like a parapet. I remember noticing it subconsciously."

"Hey!"

Larry's thoroughly unconventional manner of calling attention from his employer made the doctor smile as he threw a quick glance backward. Larry was standing with something in his hand; he was turning it over and over with an incredulous expression on his face. Then he gave another shout and sprang toward them.

"Look!" he cried breathlessly as he overtook them. He thrust upon his employer a purplish-black sliver of something shining and hard.

"Glass," pronounced Job Scudder uninterestedly, after a cursory examination.

"Sure. Glass." The airman stared at his employer, apparently scandalized at the lack of interest. "Don't you understand, sir? Glass. Glass, here. I dropped my wrench on the rocks and this sliver broke off. The rock isn't rock at all."

"What are you saying, Larry?"

"I'm saying that the rock isn't rock. The rock's artificial. The rock's solid glass!"

CHAPTER 8

"IMPOSSIBLE!" exclaimed Job Scudder, but even as he declared his incredulity he snatched at the sliver that lay on Larry's palm. "It must be obsidian."

"Not in this vicinity," declared Larry positively. "And no traces of volcanic activity have ever been discovered around the Colorado River at this point. Granted," he amended reluctantly, "that this is the Sangre de Cristo range of the Rockies."

"Then how would you account for it?" inquired Job with irony. "I suppose some ancient cliff-dweller manufactured this glass plateau," he observed, protruding blue eyes fixed on Larry's lean face that shone with excitement.

The airman colored. He moved deliberately away from the two men toward a pile of black rock. He struck sharply at one side of the rock with the wrench, and as the rock broke with a crackling sound, leaned over and picked up chunks and splinters which he examined with meticulous care.

"Sorry to differ from your opinion, sir, but this is all glass," he said positively.

"Larry, you're talking nonsense," was the impatient reply. "That whiff of chloroform has robbed you of your usual common sense," Job finished tartly. He had pulled out his glasses again, and was now examining with more attention the sliver Larry gave him.

"That's glass, Job," declared the doctor, peering at the purplish-black material. "Black glass. You know, black glass often appears purple when light strikes through it. The old American black glass becomes translucent dark amber when light passes through it. This is modern glass," he pronounced with finality, and something curious in his tone made Job look up at him quickly.

"Well, I don't see that it matters what it is, John. I want to know where my little girl is."

"You are right. I have reason to believe that we were brought here by carefully planned design. We'd better hurry on, and catch up with the rest of the party." His hand fumbled at the vest pocket where lay the mysterious talisman, wrapped tightly in a piece of gauze, fastened with a strip of surgeon's plaster. "Devilish!" he exploded.

"There's some deviltry afoot, no doubt," said Larry Weaver thoughtfully. "And Miss Scudder's gone, and the others, too," he added.

With that, he sprang toward the pile of rocks that reared high at one end of the plateau.

"Sure there's mischief abroad," he shouted back at the two old men. He waved his hand, then pointed downward. "There's a flight of stairs down the side of the plateau, and they're glass, I tell you. Glass!"

Larry disappeared after shouting his information. Job and the doctor hurried after him. He had indeed spoken the truth. A flight of winding stairs led from the edge of the plateau, amply protected by a balustrade of clear glass that sparkled like jewels in the light of the downgoing sun.

At the top of the stairs Job hesitated.

"Ought one of us to remain on the plateau?" he suggested. "It is barely possible that Quint is only trying out the 'Queen's' motors and will be returning shortly."

The doctor transfixed his friend with an unyielding regard. He shook his white head. The pale blue eyes were unutterably sad and anxious.

"He drove Gemma and Sir Hubert out of the 'Queen' at pistol-point, didn't he? No, he will not return. It was planned that we should be left here. It was meant that we should find and descend this staircase. What we find at the foot of it is also decided for us beforehand," he finished gravely.

"What could we find?"

"Let us hasten, old friend. Already the sun is low and the air grows chill. At least we will be protected from night winds if we descend this stairway."

"And at the foot of it will be Leda, of course," ventured Job just a trifle tremulously.

The old doctor did not reply. He led the way to the stairs and began the descent without further vocal surmises.

THE stairs seemed endless. They wound in and out, ending by entering at last a marble portal manifestly the work of human hands, for it was decorated across the top with a frieze portraying Pan piping while fauns and nymphs and naiads sported with satyrs and centaurs under flowery bowers and grape-laden vines.

At this evidence of modern handiwork, Job pointed speechlessly. His breath was about gone; his lung capacity had never been anything to boast about, as too many of his past years had been spent in a sedentary life.

"What's—that?" he managed at last to gasp uneasily.

The doctor stopped short to stare. The figures were dim, for the stairway was on the northeastern side of the plateau and the sun's light was only reflected dimly from canyon walls. Yet the design was unmistakable and the work was technically only too good; the satyrs appeared to grin wider at the staring men who stood before them, and the nimble fingers of Pan seemed to finger the stops of his pipes blithely.

"Come on! Don't stand here staring, Job. I'm afraid the worst has happened," the doctor said in a serious, shaken voice. "We have fallen into evil hands, Job. Let us hasten to join our comrades in misfortune. If we can," he murmured in a lower tone, with a pitying look at his anxious friend.

The two men walked on under the portal. The passage twisted until no light from the sun could possibly have entered it. Yet it was flooded with purple light.

"Where does the light come from?" demanded Job, looking about sus-

piciously. "This purplish light that uffuses everything in such a ghostly nanner?"

"That is not for us to ask now," reponded the doctor, and laid one hand irmly on his friend's arm. "Job, we've stumbled upon something terrible. . . . Old Hannah was right, and I was a fool not to have suspected! . . . Come. We must find Leda as quickly as possible. God be thanked that I've my pocket medicine case with me!"

Job looked queerly at his companion.

"That's a strange thing to say, John. A rather terrifying thing to say," he faltered, his protruding blue eyes suffusing with quick moisture. "What do you expect——?"

"In that small box is swift and certain and easy death, if such should be necessary," replied the doctor grimly. "Is it not better to lose the life than to mortgage the soul? Come! Hurry!"

Larry's voice rang out only a short distance ahead. Then came the loud barking of a dog, suddenly muffled as if a door had closed between the animal and themselves.

The doctor's brow corrugated heavily, as around a corner of the passage the two friends stepped into a spacious chamber walled and ceiled and floored by the same glass, irradiated by purplish light that cast ghastly shadows across their pale faces.

Larry Weaver was standing close to the opposite wall, feeling with nervous fingers all over the glass, and Gemma Panelli was emulating him agitatedly.

"It was right here," Larry was crying, and Gemma disputed in a voice choked with fright and grief: "No, it was over here."

They did not pause in their strange behavior even although the two old men drew up close behind them.

Standing by himself, his face pressed against the glass until his nose flattened into a white gob, was Sir Hubert. What was he staring at? What—— Job Scudder uttered a terrible cry.

"Leda! My little girl!"

On the farther side of that purplish glass wall, of a thickness at least of eighteen inches, stood Leda with Suki on her shoulders, and Henry Winch slightly behind her, holding Whiskers on the leash. They could be seen but dimly, only the figures, for the glass distorted and darkened their faces so that their expressions were indecipherable. As Job and the doctor plunged forward toward that glass wall, Leda flung herself against the barrier, her whole attitude one of utter fear and pleading.

With redoubled efforts, Larry Weaver and the Italian girl were feeling over the surface of the smooth glass.

"There is an opening somewhere," ground out Larry between set teeth. "It was open when we got into this big room. Miss Scudder and Mr. Winch had gone through after the dog. Just as we were about to join them, the wall swung about somehow, and—and there wasn't any opening."

He flung himself at the wall with furious earnestness, his lean figure doubling itself like a jack-knife as he swept his agile fingers up and down the smooth surface of the glass. He even struck furiously with the wrench at that smooth wall.

Job, too, would have thrown himself against it bodily had not his old friend restrained him.

"Let us meet whatever comes with dignity, for this has all been prearranged, I fear," said the physician, his fine old face grave with portent. "We can do nothing now, at all events, for—see? The purple light is fading away. God help the little girl! We surely can not," he ended grievedly, as he peered

through the thick glass barrier. "Courage!" he shouted close to it.

Leda shook her head. Apparently she could just catch the movement of his lips sufficiently to see that he was addressing her. Of course she could not hear him, thought the doctor.

Henry Winch could be seen approaching her with respectful mien. He removed his coat and spread it on the floor near the wall where the rest of the party was watching anxiously. He drew the Airedale close to her, and motioned her to be seated, his gesture telling his intention to keep watch over her.

Larry Weaver, with a kind of sobbing groan, stopped feeling over the wall.

"It's no use," said he, stupidly. "And it's all my fault. If I'd only held up the flight and looked up that fellow before taking him on, this wouldn't have happened. I'll never forgive myself. Never."

"It isn't entirely your fault, son," said Doctor Peabody quietly. "This whole outrage has been planned with such foresight that if you hadn't taken Quint on peaceably, he'd probably have knocked you out and disguised himself somehow to go in your place."

"Do you mean to tell me——" began Larry and was interrupted.

"I mean to tell you that I am carrying," said the doctor with a touch of bitterness, "a very valuable—ah—stone, to somebody in California who expects it. Unfortunately, others have learned that I have it in my possession and are taking this means of acquiring it."

"Jewel thieves!" said Larry's relieved voice. "That makes it pleasanter, Doctor Peabody. Jewel thieves wouldn't be harming—her."

In the airman's voice a resonance rang with tenderness. Old Job turned his head slowly until the protruding blue eyes rested on his pilot searchingly. Blew the wind that way? One lived and learned, thought the old magnate, and sighed.

THE light had meantime been fading slowly but measuredly as they talked. The Italian girl, giving a loud hysterical sob, sank heaped up at the foot of the wall as near her mistress as she could manage to crowd herself with the thick glass between.

"It's going to be cold, I think," the doctor said, looking about at his companions. "We're all dressed for the comfortable interior of the 'Queen', naturally. Except Larry."

Sir Hubert removed his flattened face from the glass wall and followed the doctor's eyes. His gaze stopped abruptly at Gemma, slumped against the wall in a little sobbing heap. He moved toward her a few steps, hesitated, then suddenly whipped off his coat and laid it over her shoulders.

John Peabody smiled a smile of rare sweetness.

"I was going to suggest that when your action forestalled me," he said to Sir Hubert.

Gemma looked up and in the fading light saw the situation. With a cry of fury she tore Sir Hubert's coat from her, flinging it on the ground. Then she huddled back, sobbing.

"Nothing for it now but to wait for light," said the doctor, and sat down by the weeping girl, one kind hand patting her black head gently. The sobbing grew less violent, and then ceased, and presently he knew that sleep had overtaken her.

"Your coat, Larry," said the doctor loudly, but he reached one hand for the discarded garment of Sir Hubert, which he then laid about the non-resisting girl.

"Now we'd better settle down for

the night," said the old man, his voice ringing calm and self-possessed in the gathering darkness. "When light comes, we'll be better able to plan what we are to do."

"Leda! My little girl!" mourned Job Scudder in a broken and aging voice, as he slumped on the floor near his friend.

"Sleep, old friend, if you can," advised the doctor tenderly. "Daylight may bring with it the solution of this strange problem."

To himself he thought with a shake of the head: "Daylight? It is not God's daylight that enters here. And perhaps only God knows what it may be."

CHAPTER 9

HENRY WINCH, racing after the fleeing dog and its odd rider, uttered an exclamation of astonishment and dismay as both animals disappeared from view over the edge of the plateau. His first idea was that Whiskers had inadvertently leaped to death in the canyon, swept off by his own momentum from the plateau. But although he cautiously slackened his own speed, that he might check himself and warn Leda, he almost immediately disappeared as had the dog, with a wave of his arm as he went.

Leda Scudder exclaimed as had the secretary, upon reaching a staircase cut so deeply into the rock, as she imagined it. Without hesitation—for the secretary had followed the dog down the winding stairs—the girl skipped boldly after him. Suki was somewhere below, clinging to the Airedale's back, so Leda flew downward, until she found Henry Winch standing motionless, a strange expression on his handsome face, before the great portal with its frieze of dancing, ancient gods.

She tripped as she joined him, and he reached out to catch her with a hasty exclamation of alarm. Joined in amicable understanding for the time being, at least—while they pursued the dog—Leda did not withdraw too hastily from his careful hold. Then she stood back for a moment, her eyes following his upward to that strange frieze, above a dark portal that led to the unknown, in a hidden gorge of the Colorado River out among the Rockies.

"That's odd enough," cried out the girl wonderingly.

'More than just odd," agreed Henry Winch uneasily. "I can't say I like the look of it."

She purposely misunderstood him.

"But it's beautifully done," said she, head on one side. "However did any one come to carve it in this out-of-the-way place?"

"Who knows? Anyway, the dog came this way," grunted Henry Winch disgustedly. "I suppose I've got to find him before that infernally mischievous monkey drives the poor beast wild."

Leda took fire immediately.

"Oh! You are contemptible! I—I hate you!" she stormed, her voice breaking with anger. "Poor Suki! How could she know your darned dog would run off like this?"

Henry Winch laughed a short hard laugh.

"None of us knows what may happen under unexpected conditions, do we?" he asked without looking at the girl, who flushed, then paled. "Well, I'm off after Whiskers. You'd better stay where you are. I don't like the looks of this thing. There may be people about that we won't want to meet. You'd better go back to your uncle, anyway."

"Always a coward!" taunted Leda, red-brown eyes flashing. "Do you think for a minute that I'll take orders from *you*?"

She ran past him suddenly, flew in under the bizarrely carved portal, and was

out of sight in a turn of the passage beyond.

Henry Winch uttered a groan of exasperation.

"Little devil!" said he, disrespectfully, and dashed off after her.

He did not overtake Leda's fleet feet until she had arrived in the first great hall. At sight of the open portal, beyond which the dog was rolling on the floor in his attempts to rid himself of Suki, Leda had hesitated. The dog within reach, she yet did not quite dare go too near him, although he had already shown a friendly feeling toward her. She had waited for the secretary to tackle an animal with whom he was more familiar than she.

"You ought to be spanked!" growled the secretary fiercely, as he shot past her and pulled the squawking marmoset off the dog's back.

"The very idea!" gasped the girl, reaching out for the monkey. And then she laughed as if she couldn't help herself.

Henry Winch wound the dog's leash tightly about his left hand and turned back toward the door in the wall without looking about him, for he had been so furious at Leda's unconsidered rush into what might well have been some unknown danger that he could hardly see or feel anything but irritation at her rashness.

Leda was standing with her back turned to the portal, laughing as if she could not control herself.

"If you weren't so beastly," she gurgled between paroxysms, "you'd be terribly funny. Well, you're only a poor joke, after all."

If she had expected to see the handsome young face harden with rage, she was disappointed. Instead, such an expression of incredulous apprehension and anxiety appeared upon it that Leda cried out in vague alarm.

"Good heavens! What is it?"

Henry Winch ejaculated: "By Jove!" and then added, "Run for it, Leda, while there's time."

He whirled her about, giving her a violent push toward the door in the wall. Then the girl saw, with staring eyes. But it was already too late. As she looked, the door was a door no longer; the wall became one continuous, flowing, unbroken smoothness.

"Hubert!" she cried out wildly, regained something of her blasé poise with an effort and corrected herself: "Pardon me . . . Henry. You must overlook my mistake in calling you by the name you gave me when you—when you lied to me," she finished disdainfully, turned her back upon him and walked off, carrying the marmoset which had sprung to her when lifted from its perch on the Airedale's back.

"But this is incredible!" exclaimed Henry Winch, disregarding Leda's innuendoes with an indifference that piqued the girl.

He went over to the wall and examined it meticulously—without result; apparently not even a crack existed in that shining purple smoothness.

"Incredible," repeated the secretary, his handsome face pale with emotion.

"Does it frighten you?" sarcastically inquired Leda, nonchalantly opening the cigarette case which she drew from the pocket of her sports blouse.

She lighted her cigarette with an air of indifference, warm brown eyes craftily upon her companion under their long lashes. The secretary paid not the slightest attention to her, but continued to examine the wall persistently.

"Not a crack!" he verified his impres-

sion aloud. "Not a single sign that there has ever been an opening here."

"And what of it?" taunted Leda, inhaling deeply of her cigarette, her head tilted on one side. "Are you afraid, poor Henry Winch? Of course, one doesn't expect a valet——"

"It might be more suitable for you to be a little serious, Leda," snapped the secretary with a frown, giving the girl his attention at last. "We have fallen into some kind of trap like a pair of fools. Look!"

On the other side of the glass wall Leda saw the Italian girl and Sir Hubert standing. They had stopped short at the barrier. In another moment, Larry Weaver appeared running toward them.

Leda pressed close to the glass and shouted. Gemma's eyes were strained; her attitude that of one who listens intently, but she shook her head, her black eyes wild with fear of the unknown. She turned to Sir Hubert, then to Larry, and then flung herself at the wall, clawing at it with frantic hands.

"She must have seen the portal closing, as she came into the big room," Henry Winch observed thoughtfully. "Well, you'd best stay here while I explore a bit to see if there isn't some other way out. I'll leave the dog."

"Oh, if there's going to be any fun, Leda Scudder's coming along," retorted the girl with an assumption of gayety. "Not much shall I stay here alone, my good Mr. Winch," she patronized airily.

The secretary flushed, opened his lips as if about to speak, then drew them together tightly and maintained silence.

"Besides, it's getting dark," Leda insisted. "Oh, there's Uncle Job and the doctor."

It was indeed getting darker. But before the darkness fell upon them entirely, Leda saw that Larry's efforts to find the crack in the wall were vain, and realized, like her uncle and his party on the other side of the wall, that there was nothing to do but resign oneself to the coming of another day's purple light, if come it might.

"If you will pardon me, I'd be glad to have you put my coat about your shoulders," offered Henry Winch, so respectfully that Leda squirmed, her pretty nose wrinkling.

"Thank you. I want nothing from you. Quite nothing," she emphasized hardily.

She curled herself up in a tight little bunch at the foot of the wall. But the secretary, still very respectfully, removed his coat and spread it for her, rather stonily remarking that it might hurt Mr. Scudder less if he thought she was being taken care of. Leda, hot resentful color in her cheeks, moved over onto the secretary's coat.

Henry Winch made the dog lie down beside her.

"He can even be used for a pillow," murmured the secretary, deprecatorily. "I've often used him for that myself."

Suiting her action to this suggestion, Leda laid her head upon the shaggy dog's warm body, the marmoset cuddling in the curve of one arm, huddled herself together and after a long, long time fell asleep, conscious even in her slumber that the echoing feet of Henry Winch tramped continually before her in the long night watch he had elected to undertake.

A comfortable sensation of reassurance and safety crept over her and she did not attempt to banish it. At least, the secretary was a human companion and a man, even if he had lied to her, thought she.

She wakened after what seemed centuries of troubled dreams. It was the stirring of the dog's shaggy body under her head, when the animal sprang with a portentous growl directly at something.

There was a warning shout from Henry Winch, smothered almost in its inception. A shuffling of feet, and the dog, too, was suddenly silent.

The air smelled sweet. It was as if some one were burning a heavy and pungent incense, almost cloying. Henry Winch's cry, the dog's barking, seemed part of a dream. Leda's nostrils were full of the smell of the incense. Her breath came more and more slowly. She slipped supinely back upon the secretary's coat, with a little sigh of relaxation. As she lost herself in a delicious stupor, arms reached down and she was lifted up and held gently.

She smiled. Her lips pursed expectantly. A half-whisper parted her lips. "Hubert——"

Through the purple dark, pierced here and there by the flashing light of torches, went tramping feet, and there swung a gilded litter. Leda Scudder lay within the litter still and white upon those silken, downy cushions.

CHAPTER 10

DAWNING. A purple radiance came from every side, growing gradually brighter as it appeared to penetrate the glassy walls about the waiting group in the great antechamber.

Accustomed to sleeping in snatches under all conditions, the doctor wakened to his surroundings first, refreshed by the catnaps he had forced himself to take during the long night. Pulling out his bifocals from the case where he had stored them for safety during the night, the old man donned them and slowly scanned the faces about him.

Job Scudder slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion, induced by his grief and anxiety; long, deep sighs breathed from his lips at intervals, and they tightened now and then as if he dreamed unhappily. Gemma had slipped from her crouching attitude until her body lay extended on the glassy floor; Sir Hubert's coat covered her, and Sir Hubert's arm was under her head. Sir Hubert himself leaned uncomfortably against the wall, uttering an occasional breath stertorous enough to have been called a snore.

The doctor's eyes, after a puzzled pause, moved from them and rested on the lean, arrogant face of Larry Weaver. As he looked, Larry's eyes opened in so alert a fashion that the old man realized that here, at least, had been a sleepless man, for heavy shadows darkened them and the usually clear whites were slightly bloodshot.

"You didn't sleep, my boy," said the physician pityingly in a low voice.

"How could I?" returned the pilot reproachfully, "when she—Miss Leda——" and he broke off short, his teeth setting hard together.

With a shamed feeling that he had obtruded himself into a man's most secret heart, the doctor looked through the purple glass into the adjoining chamber where last night he had seen, fading into the purple mist, Leda and the young secretary. An incredulous and anxious look overspread his kindly old face as he met the pilot's eyes again.

"As soon as it was light enough, I saw that they were gone," said Larry gravely. "During the night I am sure I saw flickering lights, like torches, on the other side of this wall." Only the agony in his eyes betrayed his apprehensions for Leda.

"Gone!" The doctor scrambled to his feet, one hand pressing mechanically that vest pocket where Hannah Wake's mysterious stone was tucked. "Gone! Oh, if only this wall would open to us now!"

A cry from Gemma, who had wakened

at the sound of voices and with a glare of fury at Sir Hubert had withdrawn herself into a resentful heap against the wall.

"Look!" cried she, trembling finger directed at that point in the wall where there had been, for a short time the night before, a portal.

Job Scudder, rubbing his eyes shamedly, scrambled to his feet and stared. The solid wall—why, it was impossible! The marvel of it took his mind away, for the moment, from Leda's danger.

"It's flowing away like water!" cried out Sir Hubert, jumping to his feet and retreating like a man amazed and terrified, while he stared with widening eyes.

The wall was, indeed, opening before the little group of astonished watchers. Like a viscid molten metal it flowed apart until there remained an aperture shaped like a great doorless portal, and then it stayed its flow.

Larry Weaver was first to take advantake of the incredible fact. Pulling an automatic pistol from the belt strapped under his jacket, he sprang forward and was through the opening, followed closely by the Italian girl and Job Scudder. The old doctor, casting a look of pity and disgust upon the motionless Sir Hubert, who stood as if frozen to the spot, joined the others inside the purple walls.

Before them were other transparent walls, through which a distinctly golden light pierced like rays of the tropical midday sun. Larry advanced until he could press against the farther wall, about three hundred feet from the open portal through which the party had come, Sir Hubert having recovered sufficiently from his mazed trance to accompany them. The sight below was marvelous and astonishing.

Through that golden glow permeating the glass walls, the group looked out and down upon a valley, apparently roofed with that same purple glass of which the plateau and staircase had been made; for it was obvious that the yellow light pervading everything came from an enormous globe set in the center of that spreading, dome-like roof. Great square buildings flashed with colors of every hue, dazzling the unaccustomed eye. Every building was open at the top to the brilliant rays of that golden artificial sun, and every building was windowless and doorless. Occasionally a shadow seemed to stir behind some building, but in the streets no living creature moved.

Each building was landscaped with trees, shrubs, plots of flowers. These, also, flashed bewildering colors to the eyes of the onlookers. It was as if these ornamental plants were also made of brilliantly tinted glass, they glistened so hard and bright and flashed back so strangely the golden globe's yellow rays.

There was the sudden rich chiming of bells from below. On the ears of the listeners the sound came softly like echoes from some long-gone time. As if in direct answer, openings appeared in the sides of the buildings; the walls rolled back like scrolls. Through these portals marched into the glass-paved streets hundreds of gayly clad human beings, all headed in the same direction, toward a building greater than all the rest, and situated on a slight rise, where it dominated the entire settlement. This building was topped by a great dome with a central opening directly under the artificial sun in the purple glass sky.

"LEDA? What has become of Leda?" murmured the tense voice of Job, suddenly realizing that his niece and her escort were nowhere in sight. "She has gone out of here. There must be a way out." And he whirled around and began staring about him.

As his eyes met the doctor's piteously,

his old friend hitched up his glasses nervously and, stepping away from the golden glow of the scene below, scanned the surrounding walls with keen eyes. No opening save that by which they had entered. He shook his head.

"Even if He appears to have delivered us over to the Evil One for the moment, we are in the hands of God, old friend. Hold fast to that, Job."

"Here comes that scoundrel!" shouted Larry Weaver then, and he gripped the automatic fiercely. "Let him come within my reach and I'll have the truth out of him."

The two old friends turned back and gazed. As they looked at the yellow transparency of wall, a portion rolled back thickly as had the purple wall, and in the opening thus disclosed there appeared the thick-set figure of Quint, in a costume that held them all gaping for the moment.

He wore a brief-skirted garment of deepest crimson, edged with strange embroidered symbols in black. His neck and arms were bare, as were his legs. Crimson sandals protected his feet. About his neck, suspended by a golden chain, hung a square plaque gemmed with variously colored jewels, like the insignia of a heathen priest. His forehead was bound by a golden circlet, in the center of which a medallion reared itself, portraying a goat-legged man playing the pipes.

"Pan!" screamed out Gemma, in a sudden accession of fright, and plunged against the breast and into the arms of Sir Hubert, who mechanically held her with her face thus hidden, the while a veritable procession of half-dazed expressions chased themselves over his countenance. *"Dio ci aiuta! Santa Vergine,* have mercy!"

Larry bounded forward, the automatic directed at this strangely metamorphosed Quint, who stood regarding them composedly, stirring never a muscle as he awaited the furious onslaught of the air pilot. Disturbed, against his will and judgment, by the other man's immobility and composure, the attacker paused when within a few feet of Quint, and hesitated.

"That is better," murmured Quint's voice. The intonation indicated subtle amusement at the other's hesitation.

"What's the meaning of this mummery?" demanded the stern voice of Doctor Peabody, pushing himself into the foreground and striking down the extended hand of Larry Weaver that held the automatic. "Why have we been brought here? Where is the young lady?"

Quint regarded his former employer seriously, with a loftiness of mien that the old doctor found intensely irritating. At last he said quietly: "The meaning of everything will be made clear to you all shortly. Miss Scudder is safe and in good hands. It may interest you to learn that the most stupendous honor that has ever yet been bestowed upon a woman will soon be hers."

"Where is she? Where is my little girl?" cried out Job Scudder brokenly. "I will give you millions if you will restore her to me unharmed." He extended imploring hands.

Quint's handsomely heavy face altered subtly as he looked at the airplane magnate. Something like a quick sigh parted his lips.

"You shall see her soon. Meantime, will you all please follow me? A room is in readiness for you, where you can rest and learn the reason for your having been brought here. Possibly, too, you would relish some breakfast?" He smiled.

He turned and led the way down a broad flight of glittering stairs on the outer side of the wall. Close upon his

heels trod Larry Weaver, the automatic still in his hand, dark menace on his lean, honest face.

"I don't know what deviltry you're up to, fellow," murmured Larry, as he stepped along behind his former assistant, "but I do know that if the young lady has lost so much as a hair from her bright head, you're due to suffer for it. Understand?"

Quint turned on the pilot an inscrutable smile and walked steadily onward until the whole party arrived at the foot of the stairs, where an escort awaited, clad in kirtles like the ancient Romans, and armed with spears tipped with what appeared to be flame-shaped mazda bulbs. There was not a face among these men that did not hold a deep gravity, a secrecy of eye, an air of mystery, that piqued the suspicious curiosity of John Peabody to the utmost.

"Something's going on down here that's mighty big and important," the old doctor said to himself. His hand flew upward to locate the precious glowing talisman, but as quickly dropped to his side, as he flung a shrewd glance about to see if his impulsive action had been observed. Evidently not, for the body of spear-armed men closed about the members of the little party and the entire company moved down the glass-paved street in the direction of the central, dominating building.

Gemma, recovering somewhat from her fever of fear, had withdrawn scowling from Sir Hubert's protecting arms and marched stolidly beside Larry Weaver. Sir Hubert stumbled along as if his nervous apprehensions had unfitted his whole muscular system from functioning properly. The two old friends, drawn closely together, Job's hand resting trembling on the doctor's arm, walked gravely behind the rest. And so they passed along that strange and silent street, lined with what the doctor realized were indeed trees and shrubs of glittering, brittle glass, abnormally beautiful to the point of fearfulness.

Thus they came to the great central temple. For temple it proved to be.

Quint, marching before the party, entered the massive portal. Behind him came Larry, gun in hand. From the lips of the Italian girl a wailing cry sobbed out as she pointed to the carved bas-relief above the portal.

"Pan! Pan! Oh, we are all lost!"

CHAPTER 11

IT WAS a strange dream, a dream with a nightmare quality that was more than slightly unpleasant. First of all it was the cold; biting cold that chilled to the marrow. Leda opened her eyes in this arctic dream, and shivered at its actuality.

She lay extended upon a slab of gleaming yellow glass topping a long, wide table like an altar upon a kind of dais. There were people standing around; people who looked down at her and made soft comments to one another. This was infuriating. It was a dream, she knew, but she did not care to lie supinely there like a clinical case under the students' appraising eyes.

So she sat up but found even this simple movement difficult. This was because she was no longer wearing her comfortable sports clothes; her body was swathed tightly in cloth of gold that glittered dazzlingly as if studded with many-colored jewels. Something tight against her forehead, too, certainly was not a soft little felt hat. Putting her hands to her head, she discovered a coronet bearing some kind of bossy medallion in front.

It was too ridiculous. She laughed merrily.

At the sound of that spontaneous mirth one of the three individuals who had been looking down at her moved forward a pace, deep-set black eyes piercing uncomfortably past the frontier of impassive young face that stared at him amusedly from under the coronet.

To him Leda observed gayly: "This is just too silly. Of course, it is a dream. But what is it supposed to be about?"

She stared at this man, reverend of aspect with his snowy beard, his mop of leonine white hair upon which rested a black skull-cap decorated with a golden medallion embossed with a figure that was half man, half goat. Upon the breast of his flowing gown of black, relieved by cabalistic figures in scarlet and metallic thread, hung suspended by massive links a great square of gold set with many-colored jewels, but with a hollow space in its very center.

"Well?" prompted Leda, with the confidence of her knowledge that she was enjoying an especially strange dream.

"All is very well," replied the mellifluous voice of the old man, and he turned to give some one behind him a significant look.

Leda's red-brown eyes followed his movement and she checked the cry that rose to her lips, a cry of incredulous astonishment. For that at which she looked was indeed the figment of a nightmare. Yet, in spite of her feeling that in a moment she would waken, she could not help but shrink from that strange sight. Not even in a dream could she have thought to see such a creature. She stared, her breath coming in trembling jerks of excitement. This dream, she told herself, was a pippin.

The Creature at which she looked was waiting patiently to meet her gaze, when her eyes rose from its incredible feet up to its face. Something puckish and disagreeably sly lay behind the apparently good-humored smile with which it acknowledged her astonished interest. The straggling locks that tumbled over its low, broad forehead half revealed, half concealed, two tiny knobs of polished black. . . .

"Impossible!" ejaculated Leda aloud. And with that she swung her slim silken legs back upon the golden glass slab and closed her eyes, flinging one arm across her face.

A laugh that was half bleat, half whinny, shuddered across her consciousness. There was the clicking as of small hoofs on the glass pavement.

The girl moved her head quickly and opened her eyes. The Creature was no longer to be seen. She sat up then, with a sigh of relief. That Being had been too unpleasantly bizarre, even for a dream. And then her gaze fell upon a third person who until that moment had been standing discreetly behind the old man.

"Quint! What business have *you* in my dream?"

Leda felt distinctly outraged that the mechanic should appear so composedly in this odd dream of hers, garbed like a prince of ancient times. His voice, when he spoke, startled her; it did not sound like a dream voice. Nor did his words seem like dream words.

"Well, Miss Scudder?" said he calmly, moving forward. "So this is a dream?"

"Isn't it?" faltered Leda. "If it isn't, where is Mr. Winch?"

"In safety. Also the dog Also the monkey," finished Quint, smiling but respectful.

Leda let herself gingerly down to the pavement, her sandalled feet slipping against the glass. She fumbled for a

cigarette, then remembered that she was not wearing her sports clothes.

"Darn!" said she fervently. And then, remembering: "So you say this isn't a dream. If it isn't, where is my uncle? And what did you mean by going off with the 'Queen' the way you did?"

"All that seems strange to you now shall be adequately explained later," interposed the older man. "You have been brought to this hidden place purposely, to aid in carrying out plans so far-reaching that they may well revolutionize the future of the entire world."

The girl threw her head back and laughed.

"How nice! This is the funniest dream I've ever had."

Dark color dyed Quint's proud face.

"You will be wise to accept this 'dream' in a more serious manner," he rebuked warningly. "Already the first fruits of the plan have materialized astonishingly. Did you not see with your own eyes the Great God Pan in person?"

"Pan?" echoed the girl, amazed. "Oh, no! Are *you* crazy, or am *I*? Pan? That —that silly billy-goat thing?" Again her head went back and her lips bubbled with a laugh of derision. "Oh, this is certainly a queer dream!"

Quint took a quick step toward her. The old man laid a restraining hand on his arm, and he recovered his equanimity. His sudden smile carried a tinge of condescension.

"Laugh, High Priestess!" he hailed her. "Laughter. That's what Pan will be bringing the sad world . . . laughter. It comes from the nature-god, just as grief came from the Man of Sorrows. The world has suffered long enough with its heavy burden of pain and sadness. Pan will change all that. He may be soulless, as some claim, but his spirit is gay, and mirth treads closely in his footsteps. The world needs happiness. And you——" He hesitated, then stopped with a firm pressure of his lips.

"Go on. Do! And I?" urged the girl, lips curling in a delicately derisive smile.

"I wonder if you are entirely worthy," cogitated Quint aloud. "You are to serve Pan as High Priestess of Joy. Perhaps . . . your fate may be even greater than that. Suppose the old high gods should choose your mortal body for their——" Again he broke off.

"Now I *know* that you are out of your senses and that this is just a dream," declared the girl.

Quint's heavily handsome face looked gravely at her.

"Perhaps," he vouchsafed, tight-lipped. "Still, if you don't mind, you will follow me to the shrine."

"I'll go in one direction only," declared the girl wilfully, high color on her tanned cheeks. "That is wherever Mr. Winch now is. I don't trust you, Quint. Not even in a dream."

The old man spoke then, suavely. "Read what lies in my eyes, maiden."

LEDA turned and looked into those deep-set black orbs behind which were burning tremendous emotions at once alluring and intriguing. Behind that reverend, priestly aspect lay something of age-old wisdom, age-long patience, and . . . more. It seemed hardly a moment that she had looked, when Leda was dimly conscious of that weakening of her personal will that more than ever convinced her she was dealing with a dream situation.

When the high priest spoke, she walked sluggishly after Quint, in obedience to the suggestion. Yet across her consciousness ran a thread of thought that at once terrified and braced her inner self: "If it is a dream, no harm is being done. But if it isn't——"

As if in reply to her thoughts, Quint spoke:

"It depends upon you whether all goes well with your party, or whether they are turned over to the Pan-worshippers to be torn limb from limb. You are fated to become high priestess of Pan. Do you think his people will brook any wavering on your part?"

The dream was getting a bit out of hand, thought Leda to herself. But she followed docilely, feeling without the inner initiative to rebel. And then, she excused herself, it was all so intriguing. . . .

At the farther end of a great hall, Quint paused, laying one hand upon a richly embroidered curtain that concealed one end of the room from view.

"Evohe Pan!" he cried, exultation in his voice. "Behold the virgin priestess come to lay her virginity and obedience upon the altar of the world's happiness!"

The rings of the curtains clinked and tinkled. The young man pulled the curtain to one side, and urged Leda forward, his hand under her arm.

Upon a luxuriously cushioned divan sprawled that Being whom she had seen when first she had thought she was wakening. The sly eyes were mockingly upon her. The goat body stirred. The hairy goat-legs moved briskly to the floor. The Creature sat upright. Its pointed ears, set low on the small head, seemed to move of themselves, as if to reach out and absorb the smallest sound that might be uttered. . . . almost as if to absorb a thought before it had become audibly expressed in words. . . .

A high, tittering laugh. At this, Leda shuddered and stared, conscious that some foreign power had usurped or deadened her will. A shrill voice addressed her.

"Maiden, you fear. Do not be afraid! Pan brings joy only. Unless—but you will yield yourself to joy, maiden? Unlimited joy! Complete abandon to everlasting happiness."

"Evohe Pan!" murmured Quint's deep voice at Leda's elbow.

The travesty cast its narrowed, sly eyes upon that fervent worshipper and again that whinnying laugh escaped its thick lips.

"Look upon the divine Pan, maiden, and forget that he is aught but a living symbol, materialization of an idea that lived in ancient days, and has come to earth again to bring back the simple joys of natural living to a sorrow-drowned world."

"Evohe Pan!"

Leda's numb lips could not move. Stupefaction had her in its sway. Was this a dream? How could it be a dream, when the latchet of one sandal, slipped uncomfortably loose, was hurting her foot so sharply? Pain was not felt in a dream. . . .

"The Powers That Were will soon come to life again!" exulted the Goat-man.

"May that be soon, great Pan!" cried Quint. Passionate abandon made his voice tremble. "It is hard to stand so long in the ante-chamber of such tremendous import, and wait — and wait——"

"On lesser gods?" tittered that which called itself Pan. "Be satisfied, young worshipper, with the Now, which endures forever. The Then is not always what you think it will be. You are in too great haste to satisfy your pride and ambition."

Leda Scudder, trembling now with the sense of some vague horror that was to come upon the world, swayed as she stood. It was *not* a dream. She could feel the sharp pain of the sandal's latchet

under her foot. God in heaven, it was *not* a dream! It was something incredible, yet something that must be accepted. Her knees gave slowly under her.

From his dais the Goat-god tripped nimbly down on neat hoofs and would have caught up the girl's fainting form, had not Quint, with a sudden intake of breath, very obviously reminded Pan of something. The Creature stopped short, with a long look of warm calculation in its narrowed eyes as it gazed at the relaxed body of the girl, which the young man had caught in his muscular arms. Smiling slyly and with a faint titter, it remounted the dais and impatiently motioned Quint to retire with his fair burden.

As the young man retired, the shrill voice followed him.

"If not today, then tomorrow, for all time is mine," tittered the Goat-god as a valedictory.

The strange, the incredible adventures of Leda and her friends among the Pan-worshippers will be told in next month's chapters of this story.

FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

By H.P. LOVECRAFT

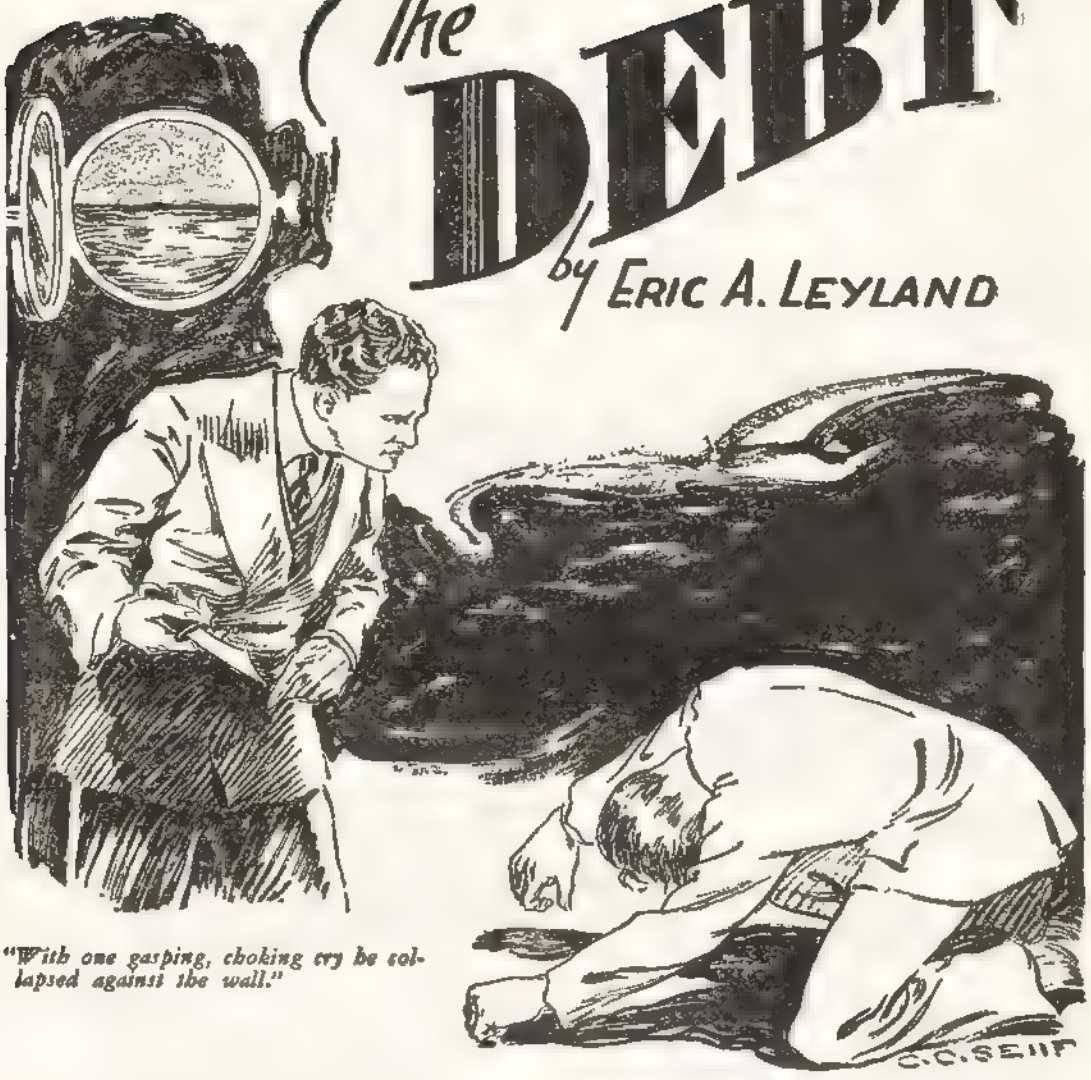
4. ANTARKTOS

Deep in my dream the great bird whispered queerly
Of the black cone amid the polar waste;
Pushing above the ice-sheet lone and drearly,
By storm-crazed eons battered and defaced.
Hither no living earth-shapes take their courses,
And only pale auroras and faint suns
Glow on that pitted rock, whose primal sources
Are guessed at dimly by the Elder Ones.

If men should glimpse it, they would merely wonder
What tricky mound of Nature's build they spied;
But the bird told of vaster parts, that under
The mile-deep ice-shroud crouch and brood and bide.
God help the dreamer whose mad visions show
Those dead eyes set in crystal gulfs below!

The DEBT

by ERIC A. LEYLAND



"With one gasping, choking cry he collapsed against the wall."

THERE were only three men left in the smoking-room of the *Mauretania,* for it was growing late. The talk had turned to spiritualism, and the youngest man there had flatly refused to believe "in such nonsense."

"Well," said the gray-haired man, sitting in the corner, "I remember a very curious incident which happened to me on this very ship, some years ago. Perhaps you would care to hear it. But before I start, let's fill up once again and get comfortable."

The other two nodded assent, and waited.

"Well," said the gray-haired man, settling himself down in his chair, "it happened in 1919, year after the war finished; I was connected with a New York paper at the time, and was crossing to England to study economic conditions there. Right from the start, I seemed to be dogged by bad luck, or something worse. I had no sooner got on board the ship than I found that the cabin I had booked was occupied. Down I went to

the purser's cabin, in a bit of a stew. Yes, it was right enough, I certainly had booked the cabin, but unfortunately, so had someone else. A mistake had been made, quite a possible slip to happen even on a big ship. I had never known it happen before, though.

"The purser went on to say that he was very sorry, but that it was impossible to give me a cabin to myself, as it was the busy season and the ship was full.

"Well, I was pretty wild, I can tell you, having gone to the trouble of booking a cabin so long in advance; and I didn't like the idea of sharing a cabin with a stranger for six days.

"At that moment, however, a man who had just come in, and had evidently overheard the last part of my conversation, spoke up.

" 'Perhaps,' he said, 'the gentleman wouldn't mind sharing my cabin.'

"He spoke in a rather curious strained voice, and he somehow gave me the impression that he was most anxious for me to fall in with his suggestion. Absurd, of course, because the man was a perfect stranger, and yet it was with a curious reluctance that I accepted his offer. Perhaps even then some premonition of evil came to me. With an effort I dispelled it. 'Absurd, of course.'

"Mr. Harker, as he said his name was, was rather a florid type of man, with a big, fleshy face. Only his hair saved him from being commonplace, and this was magnificent. It was flecked with gray, and round the temples was rapidly thinning. His face was careworn and lined, and in his eyes, at any rate to me, there seemed to be a lurking fear. Add to this the fact that he had a habit of casting swift, nervous glances to right and left, and you have a picture of the main player in the tragedy, as it was soon to become.

"As I say, I dispelled the idea of anything sinister in his suggestion, and readily fell in with it. Besides, the fellow interested me strangely, and I was convinced that behind those eyes, and that almost furtive look, there lay a story.

"Well, you can't very well sleep with a man for long before you get to know something about him. And I hadn't been with him long before I began to see that there was something queer about the man. He would start at the slightest sound, and when a book happened to drop behind his back, I could see that he was in a chronic state of nerves. The man was obviously in a blue funk about something or someone, and I was resolved to find out what it was.

"One day, I happened to come into our stateroom rather quietly, and found Harker sitting at the table with his back to me. I got quite close to him without his hearing me; he was so absorbed in something he was looking at. As soon as he heard me, he turned round with a start. Then I saw that the thing he had been so interested in was a photograph, although the back was toward me, and I couldn't see the actual picture.

" 'What d'you want?' he rasped. 'Spying, eh?'

"Well, I suppose I must have looked pretty wild at that, because the next minute he was all apologies.

" 'Forgive me,' he muttered, 'I'm all on edge. My confounded nerves.'

"Well, I could see that he was done up, so I said no more about it. But it made me think."

Here the gray-haired man stopped to knock the ash off his cigar.

"WELL," he resumed, "I think it was that same night that the next thing happened. Suddenly, about one o'clock, I woke up with a start. The door of the stateroom was half open, and a dim ray of light filtered through. It was the shaded reading-lamp on the table, so

I surmised. Harker was not in his bunk, and I guessed at once that he must be in the stateroom. I don't know what made me do it, but I swung out of my bunk and crept to the door, overmastered by curiosity.

"There was Harker, sitting at the table, with his back to me. He was looking at the same photograph which I had seen earlier in the day. By his side, resting on the table, was an ugly-looking revolver. I didn't disturb him; I didn't like the look of the weapon. So I just waited there, peeping in through the half-open door. I could see the photograph quite plainly now. It was the portrait of a young man, about twenty-five years of age. From what I could see, he was extraordinarily handsome; but the photo was creased, and nearly falling to bits.

"Harker kept muttering to himself, but I couldn't hear properly what he said; except that he kept on saying, 'My God,' over and over again, with such a despairing note in his voice that I took pity on him. Suddenly he jerked the revolver to his head, and if he had intended to kill himself I couldn't have stopped him. But no; he lowered the revolver after a minute.

" 'No, not that way,' he muttered. 'I can't do it, I can't do it.'

"After a bit he got up, preparatory to turning the light out, and I tiptoed back to bed. But I couldn't sleep for wondering. Who was the man in the photo? Did Harker fear him? And if so, why? Surely Harker couldn't be afraid of a man young enough to be his son. And so it went on all night. I managed to snatch an hour's sleep toward morning, but nevertheless I was up and out on deck early enough.

"Out there on the sunny deck, it was hard to imagine that I had witnessed a scene the previous night which had so nearly ended in tragedy. I walked to the side and looked down into the deep green waters below. The vessel was making good headway in the first stretch of calm weather we had encountered, and a white wake showed where we had spurned the waves. Suddenly, I had a feeling that I was being watched. I looked round quickly, and just had a swift vision, a fleeting glimpse of a man standing by the companionway. The next moment he had disappeared, but not before I had seen who it was.

"That man had the face I had seen in the photo. For a moment I was staggered. Was it possible? That photo had seemed to me to be very old, and yet here was the original in flesh and blood, exactly the same as when the photo had been taken. This all occupied only a moment. The next instant, I was down the stairs. There was a man down there cleaning some brass, whistling vigorously while he did so.

" 'Excuse me,' I said, 'but did you see a man come down these stairs a minute ago?'

" 'No, sir,' he replied. 'There's been nobody down these stairs this morning; not since I've been here, at any rate.'

" 'No one been down here?' I echoed incredulously. 'Why, man, I saw a man go down these stairs not above a minute ago.'

" 'I'm afraid you must be mistaken, sir,' said the man. 'Nobody ain't been down these stairs since I've been here. Perhaps you were dreaming, sir,' looking at me curiously.

"Muttering my thanks I went on down to the cabin.

"Harker was just getting up, when I came in. 'Hello,' he said, more genial than he had been for some days. 'Been having an early stroll, haven't you?'

" 'Yes,' I said shortly. 'Look here, Harker, have you ever imagined you've seen a thing that wasn't there?'

"He turned to me with a start. 'What do you mean?' he said.

"I related what had happened, leaving out about the photo. The recital seemed to have a stunning effect upon Harker.

" 'Did you say he was a young man?' he muttered; then not waiting for my reply, but going straight on: 'It must be the same.' Then he sat down heavily into a chair. 'So he's found me again, has he?'

"At this I ventured to point out to him that I didn't know what he was talking about.

" 'No, no, you wouldn't,' he said heavily, and walked out of the room.

"Well, as you may guess, I had plenty to think about, and after breakfast I went on deck to try and puzzle it out. I was convinced that there was something pretty queer going on on board that ship. Assuming that I wasn't mad, there must be some explanation to account for the man I had seen. Because I *had* seen him; there was no doubt at all about that. Then how had he disappeared from that passage? At last I gave it up, accepting against my will the explanation that the man was a friend of Harker's, who didn't yet know that he was on board. But even this didn't explain the incident by the companionway, or the fact that the photograph I had seen was yellow with age. Anyhow I left it at that, although I was far from satisfied.

"You fellows frightfully bored?" asked the gray-haired man, lighting another cigar. "Because I should like to finish it now.

"THAT evening, I had occasion to go down to the stateroom for a book, meaning to have a quiet read before turning in. Harker was already on deck, and I meant to join him. I had already found the book, when there was a knock at the door. I crossed the room and opened it. There, framed against the opening, stood the man I had seen that morning, the man of the photograph. With an effort I controlled myself, cursing myself inwardly meanwhile for a fool. The man had come to see Harker, of course. He had just found out that he was on board.

"At last I found my voice. 'I'm afraid Mr. Harker is out,' I said.

" 'Why should you suppose I've come to see Mr. Harker?' said the stranger, in a curiously musical voice. 'May I come in?' He suited his actions to his words, and crossed the room.

" 'You wish to see me then, I take it,' I said.

" 'Yes, please, if you could spare me five minutes.'

" 'Delighted,' I muttered. 'Won't you sit down?'

"He did so, crossing his legs in a boyish fashion."

Here the gray-haired man interrupted himself to lean forward.

"Now I want you to understand," he said, impressively, "that I was absolutely powerless to prevent any of the ensuing events; I was a mere looker-on. Well, to resume.

" 'Now, Mr. Monkton,' said the stranger, leaning forward, 'I am going to tell you a story. Why I am telling it to you doesn't matter. Perhaps it is because you are friendly with Mr. Harker, that you have this privilege.' He smiled rather sardonically, I thought.

"I waited expectantly. I *knew* now that it was inevitable that this man should tell me the story. It was ordained.

"The stranger was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. His hair was dark and crisp, inclined to be a little curly. His complexion was rather brown, tanned by the sun. It was his smile, however, that was so charming. When he smiled, his whole aspect changed remarkably. And yet there was something

strange about him, something that I couldn't understand.

" 'Twenty years ago, there were two great friends, young men of about twenty-five years old; both sons of wealthy parents. One was the son of Sir Richard Thornton, the other son of a wealthy shop-owner, named Marston. One eventful week-end, Marston was staying with Cyril Thornton at Thornton Hall. That same night, Cyril had a terrible quarrel with his father over a girl. He wanted to marry her, but his father refused his consent. Their quarrel was a violent one, but, as such quarrels sometimes do, ended in a complete reconciliation. For that night, rather late, Cyril went to his father's study and apologized, and the affair was cleared up.

" 'Next morning, John the butler, going into the study to raise the blinds, found Sir Richard sprawled across the desk, dead. In his side, buried up to the hilt, was a hunting-knife, which was afterward identified as belonging to Cyril. Things looked black for young Thornton, in view of the quarrel of the night before, because not a soul knew of their reconciliation.

" 'Well, to cut a long story short, Cyril Thornton was arrested and tried for the murder of his father. He admitted that he had visited his father late that fateful night, but he denied that he had molested him in any way. He was condemned to death at the Old Bailey. He was executed on August 15th, 1899, at Pentonville Prison. But' (here the stranger leant forward impressively and tapped his finger on his knee) 'Cyril Thornton was not guilty. The murderer was——' He broke off as Harker entered the room.

" 'Hallo, Monkton,' he said, 'I thought you said you were coming up on deck? Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't see you had a visitor,' and he turned to go.

" 'Don't go, Mr. Harker,' said the stranger in a quiet voice, turning round slowly.

"At the sound of that voice Harker turned round sharply. At the sight of the man who was standing looking at him his face grew livid.

" 'You!' he gasped. Just that one word. Then with a ghastly sound, half laugh, half groan, he collapsed into a chair. His knuckles showed white through the tan of his clenched fist. His jaws worked, but no sound came. And then at last I saw it all clearly. I saw instinctively what the end would be; and I was powerless to stop it; it was physically impossible for me to interfere; I couldn't move! I was incapable of speech or action; I could only sit there while these two acted their last pitiful drama with me as audience.

" 'Thornton, Thornton,' gasped Harker. 'So it has come at last.' Then, in a sudden frenzy of fear, 'Go away, go away; don't touch me. You're dead, you're dead.' His voice rose to a scream, which ended in a gasping choke. 'Oh my God, my God!'

"The other stood looking down at him. No trace of either pity or triumph showed in his face.

" 'Well, Marston, I have come. I have kept the promise I made in the dock twenty years ago. Ah! you start at that, don't you? Do you remember it all? '"To be hanged by the neck until you are dead," said the judge. And, Marston,' he cried, rising dominant above the cowering figure in the chair, 'I am dead; the dead is risen to confront the living with their crimes.'

"At this Marston broke up. He blubbered like a child and crouched down in his chair.

" 'Keep away, keep away,' he whimpered, raising supplicating hands.

"'Thornton laughed. 'Look at me,' he commanded.

"Slowly Marston raised his eyes, compelled by a force greater than his own.

" 'Marston, my friend,' said Thornton, 'who killed Sir Richard?'

"At that the wretched man sank on his knees, groveling at the other's feet.

" 'Leave me alone, you devil. I didn't, I swear I didn't. Don't you believe me?'

" 'Marston, who killed Sir Richard?' went on that inexorable voice. There was no escaping it.

" 'I did, I did,' Marston gasped; then, seeing the intention in the other's eyes: 'Don't kill me, Cyril, don't kill me. I'm not fit to die,' and he clung to the other's knees. 'We were friends once, Cyril.'

" 'Yes, we were friends—once. Why did you kill him?'

" 'You know, you know; you know everything, you devil! The bonds; I was a ruined man, and then this chance came.'

" 'And you took it; no matter that in so doing you killed your friend's father, and let your friend die a shameful death for your crime. Oh, there are no words to describe you. Vile, utterly loathsome! What have you got to say before I kill you?'

"What little reason Marston had left was fast disappearing under the strain. With a jerk he pulled a revolver from his hip pocket, and fired twice. A lamp standing immediately behind Thornton crashed to the ground. With a groan he flung it from him, and it clattered into the corner.

" 'You poor fool,' mocked Thornton. 'Did you think you could kill me twice? Oh, I've watched you these twenty years. And you knew I was watching. You've gone in fear of your life, and not only of your life, but of your soul. Many a time you thought you'd bluffed me, didn't you? But I always turned up again. Marston, did you know what the date is?' He pointed to a calendar on the wall. 'The 15th of August, 1919! Twenty years ago today. "To be hanged by the neck until you are dead!" Sounds nice, doesn't it? Twenty years ago.' And now his voice had sunk to little more than a whisper. 'It was a cold, gray, bleak morning, as they led me out to die—then came the execution shed and the rope, and then——' His voice rose higher and higher, and then sank again. 'Twenty years.'

"Marston raised his haggard eyes. His face had aged terribly during the last few minutes.

" 'And haven't I paid for it? Twenty long years of hell. Followed, shadowed everywhere by something more terrible than man!'

" 'Yes, Marston, you've suffered as I intended you should suffer, as I planned when I was in the condemned cell. But you haven't paid in full yet. A life for a life!'

"Suddenly he drew a knife from his pocket. It was an old hunting-knife, with a bone handle. Along the blade were dull red stains. At the sight of this Marston's face turned yellow. He shrank back, until his back touched the wall. He raised his hands to his face as if to keep the sight of it away; then, with one gasping, choking cry, he collapsed against the wall, thumping heavily forward.

"For a moment the thing that had once been Cyril Thornton stood looking at him. 'It is over,' he murmured to himself. 'The debt is paid.' Then, forgetful of my presence, he slowly crossed the room, opened the door and stood for a moment looking back. Then the door quietly closed, and he was gone.

"I knew before I got to him that Marston was dead. The verdict was 'Death by heart failure.' Well, so it may have been.

"That's all, gentlemen; sorry if I've bored you," said the gray-haired man, stretching himself. "Good-night!"

A Message From Mars

By DEREK IRONSIDE

A FIZZLING arclight threw an unsteady glare upon the group of men who stood around the mouth of the shaft, the circular, steel-lined walls of which vanished into shadow underground. Suspended above the shaft from a power-crane hung a huge steel projectile that was presently to be lowered into its depths.

Bullivant turned a fierce, bearded face toward his friend. "In ten minutes, Arnold, it'll be over, one way or the other. At the bottom of that two-hundred-foot shaft there are packed three tons of merinite, the most powerful explosive known to modern science. At ten-thirteen I shall make electrical contact, and if my calculations are correct, as they must be, that projectile with my six men and myself inside it will hurtle out into space toward Mars. We shall leave the shaft-mouth at a speed approximating two miles a second and will probably reach the limit of the terrestrial atmosphere within a minute. Once out in space, I'm relying on my rocket-discharge apparatus to increase my speed to eighty thousand miles an hour. By the twenty-first day after leaving the earth we shall be falling like a meteorite on the surface of Mars, using our retarding rockets to break the force of impact."

Arnold, the night editor of the *London Argus,* shook the scientist's hand warmly. "I wish you the best of luck, Bullivant. And many thanks for getting me down here. This means a colossal scoop for my paper, you know."

As Bullivant and his companions vanished out of sight into that grim projectile, Arnold had a queer sense of the uncanniness of the whole affair. But for Bullivant's infectious enthusiasm he would have regarded this attempt to cross interplanetary space as absolutely crazy. And now, as he saw the ugly steel bullet, fifty feet long and fifteen feet in diameter, sink out of sight into the bowels of the earth, he had a presentiment that he would never see Bullivant alive again.

"Everybody to the far side of the meadow," came the stentorian roar of the young scientist in charge of the preparations above ground. Promptly, Arnold and his chief sub-editor obeyed, together with the other privileged spectators, and waited expectantly.

"You're an old friend of Bullivant's, aren't you, sir?" questioned the sub-editor curiously. "He's certainly let you on to something good. We seem to be the only press representatives here."

"Yes, I was at school with him twenty years ago. He was a fearful bully but nevertheless he seemed to take a liking to me. Also, I've been able to give him a little useful publicity from time to time, and despite his other faults he is certainly not ungrateful. But he's a very difficult man to get on with, and judging from the look of his companions he seems to have picked up six of the toughest characters in the worst of the London slums. If the Martians get on the wrong side of Bullivant and Company I shall feel sorry for them. The Spaniards among the Mexican and Peruvian Indians will be a tea-party in comparison."

"But will they ever get to Mars? More likely to come smashing back to the earth after a few miles, even if their shaft

doesn't burst when the explosive charge is fired."

"Who knows?" answered Arnold gravely. "Anyhow, Bullivant is going well prepared. There's every conceivable sort of equipment packed away in the storerooms of that projectile, from television and wireless transmitters to machine-guns and sewing-machines. Bullivant personally fitted up a special television and wireless receiver in the Argus Building last week, and he has conceded us, half playfully, half seriously, sole rights to receive Martian television. Now, hold on, it's almost thirteen minutes past. They've cleared away the crane."

A few seconds elapsed; then from the center of the huge meadow where they stood there gushed out a vertical pillar of flame reaching to the very dome of the heavens and stabbing the night sky like a gigantic blood-red sword. Almost instantaneously it was followed by a shattering explosion that shook South London to its very foundations. Bullivant's projectile had been launched.

"IT'S a month since old Bullivant went off in his crazy rocket," remarked the chief sub-editor as he brought a fresh proof into the night editor's room. "There's been never a sign of him since."

"Not a sign," agreed Arnold. "I wonder what happened to the poor devil. I've had an operator standing by night and day at the television receiver upstairs, but not a thing has come through. But of course the whole thing's fantastic. Mars is thirty-five million miles away at its nearest. Think of the enormous power required to send wireless signals over that distance. And yet Bullivant seemed confident he could do it. After all, he was clever—oh, curse that telephone. *Hello!* Who's that? Oh, yes, Jones. You say the whole broadcasting system is being jammed by atmospherics? An electric storm of unparalleled violence, you think? Yes, you might write it up; we're rather short of copy. Pad it out if you like."

Arnold put down the telephone receiver and turned to his sub-editor. "Funny we should have been talking about wireless just then. The whole broadcasting system is fuzzy tonight with chronic atmospherics and the authorities are being bombarded with inquiries and complaints. Jones is going to write us a column on it; he's fairly good at semi-scientific stuff."

There was silence in the room for a moment, while Arnold bent over his proof—comparative silence, that is, for the whole building shook and rumbled with the thud and clash of the huge rotary printing-presses resting on their concrete beds below. Then, again, the telephone bell rang.

"Answer it, Meredith," barked Arnold, intent on his work.

Meredith lifted the instrument, listened intently, and then turned to his chief.

"There's trouble on the trans-Atlantic radio system, sir. Their engineers suspect an unknown station of tremendous power but very coarsely modulated working between three hundred and six hundred meters as being the source of interference. It's jamming all their messages and they declare it's certainly not atmospherics."

Arnold was alert at last. He flung down his pen with a crash and stared intently at Meredith as though some sudden, arresting thought had struck him.

"I wonder," he began, but he got no farther. Heavy footsteps clattered on the stairway outside, and a man, disheveled, excited, burst into the room unceremoniously. It was the television operator from the room upstairs. Both Meredith and Arnold knew exactly what he was going to say.

"Professor Bullivant is signaling at last, sir. He's landed safely on Mars.

"RECEPTION was a bit poor at first, sir, and even now it's subject to a considerable amount of fading at times, but it's the professor without doubt," explained the operator.

He led the way excitedly into the darkened room, Arnold and Meredith groping their way behind him.

Upon the television-screen at the far end of the room, for all the world like the unsteady pictures thrown by the first crude cinematograph projectors of half a century earlier, there flickered and wavered, in pale pastel tints, a vision of the Martian landscape, forty million miles distant, upon which Bullivant's projectile had rudely pitched after its headlong flight through space. Bullivant himself occupied the center of the picture, gesticulating dramatically. About him there stretched sandy ground, but some hundreds of yards rearward stood out a broad belt of vegetation and stunted trees. These trees struck Arnold at once as sinister, with their long, fleshy, drooping boughs, but his attention immediately wandered to other prominent objects in the picture. On the extreme right, half buried in thrown-up masses of sand, could be seen the steel projectile. To the left stood a small wooden cross that struck sudden apprehension into Arnold's heart, while in mid-picture one of Bullivant's ruffians was carefully oiling a machine-gun. Bullivant's voice, distorted unrecognizably after its long journey through space, was croaking out a message.

". . . too close. We approached the planet at a frightful pace and fired off three retarding frontal rockets in quick succession. Even then we fell too fast. As we dropped, I saw the face of the planet clearly. It was a wonderful sight —a huge disk capped with white snowfields at its poles and marked with green irrigated areas and light red sandy deserts, across which ran a geometric grid of canals lined by thin belts of vegetation. Schiaparelli and Lowell were right —dead right—about the Martian canals. I saw we were heading for the desert which territorial astronomers call Elysium, so fired a lateral rocket in order to swing toward the fertile area of Trivium Charontis. Then the ground rushed up toward us and spread out above and below us at an alarming rate. We fired our last retarding rocket but came to ground with a terrific impact that threw us about like ninepins within the padded projectile. We must have ricochetted a mile or more before finally we came to rest.

"You can see for yourselves, I trust, the sort of country in which we find ourselves. I believe we are near the northern tip of Trivium Charontis in about latitude twenty degrees north. When we emerged from our nearly red-hot projectile into the watery Martian sunlight we wore oxygen respirators as we doubted whether the air would be dense enough to sustain terrestrial life. We have since discovered, however, that we do not need extra oxygen, as the air here, though thin, is adequate and exhilarating. This thin air is nevertheless a serious handicap, as our airplane will not rise in it until we have added additional wing-surfaces. The climate is bracing and the fact that our bodies weigh very much less here than on the earth gives us a sense of extravagant vitality.

"One of our first steps was to try and find water. Two of our men, Hester and Smith, discovered a canal five hundred yards distant. At the same time they observed a number of queer creatures in the neighborhood and promptly opened

fire on them with rifles, killing several and dispersing the remainder. These creatures, which were nothing more nor less than enormous ants, some four feet long, with very large heads, are so far the only signs of animal life we have encountered.

"On examining one of the dead ants, I was surprized to find that its brain was extraordinarily developed. It would be strange if these huge ants prove to be the ultimate masters of Mars. They seem, however, very peaceful, docile and industrious. We have since corralled a whole bunch of them and forced them to labor for us. Their sagacity is amazing. Thanks to their efforts we have succeeded in erecting our turbo-generator on the canal bank, thus making this television and wireless transmission possible.

"I am sorry to report, however, that the first night of our arrival we lost Graves, who was killed by a flesh-eating tree while we were admiring the extraordinary beauty of the night sky. Our own planet, Earth, shows up with remarkable brilliance. On the second night, another man, Hester, disappeared, although I had particularly warned him about the trees."

ARNOLD, his face lit up by the glow from the screen, looked at Meredith. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"It's wonderful, wonderful! But don't you think these men are in frightful danger? These ants may have more powerful resources behind them than Bullivant realizes. They may have captured Hester."

"There's no evidence that these ants are dangerous," said Arnold thoughtfully.

"No, but then a Martian arriving on Hampstead Heath on a Sunday afternoon would never suspect that the inoffensive humans he could see there could summon up machine-guns, tanks, artillery, warplanes and poison gas before the sun had set. To me, Bullivant's high-handed behavior means simply asking for trouble. He can't have touched the real Martian civilization yet."

"That's true enough," agreed Arnold. "But there's no doubt that Bullivant's whole idea is to seize control of the planet. Hello, what's happening?"

The picture on the screen had become intensely animated. Bullivant had leapt forward and a rifle glinted as he took aim into the sky. The man at the machine-gun had sunk on to his knees and was aiming the barrel sharply upward. Others of Bullivant's crew had also darted into sight, armed with rifles.

"This means trouble!" ejaculated Arnold tensely.

The rifles began to splutter and crackle in straggling volleys—crack-crack-crack! Then the machine-gun joined in the din with its murderous tat-tat-tat-tat . . . tat-tat-tat-tat. And now those watchers in that London room saw at last the menace that threatened those distant pioneers of terrestrial civilization.

From over the belt of trees that fringed the distant canal there poured a host of flying giant ants, each riding on a light sort of aircraft and ranged in regular formations that moved up across the sky with an ominous persistence. One or two seemed to drop out as the rifle and machine-gun fire caught them, but the main host advanced as irresistibly as a flight of locusts. Closely packed in the heavens and flying at a low altitude, the ants visibly darkened the sky, and the drone of a multitude of rotating wings overwhelmed the puny explosions of the rifles. Panic obviously seized upon Bullivant and his men; they threw down their arms and bolted wildly toward the

projectile, whose gaping entrance stood open, but in the confusion they jammed together in one struggling mass. Bullivant felled one of his followers with a terrific blow between the eyes. The next moment, the locust-like cloud seemed to fall out of the sky and the doomed men were hidden in seething waves of tearing, fighting, giant ants.

"Switch the thing off," moaned Meredith. "I can't bear to look."

But Arnold continued to stare at that dreadful tragedy as if fascinated. Then a crawling ant seemed to catch sight of the televisor and came slowly and steadily toward it, his scaly features growing larger and larger until they almost filled the screen. For a moment his weird face, lit up with ferocity and yet with a queer intelligence, was turned full on Arnold, the red ant-eyes seeming to glare defiantly into the man's. And then with dramatic suddenness the picture faded and flickered out.

MANY months have passed since that strange message and vision was received from Mars at the Argus Building, and no further communication has come since. By Arnold's instructions the apparatus is always kept in order, but he is inwardly certain that Professor Bullivant will never again signal to his mother planet, the Earth.

Siesta

By ALEXANDER L. KIELLAND

IN ONE of those elegant bachelors' lodgings in Rue Castiglione a merry company lingered over the dessert.

Señor José Francisco de Silvis was a Portuguese, short in stature, black as a coal. He was one of those Brazilians who are wont to cross the ocean with incredible fortunes, to lead incredible lives in Paris, and to distinguish themselves, above all things, by making the most incredible acquaintances.

At this little dinner-party there was hardly one who was acquainted with his neighbor on the right, or on the left; excepting, of course, those coming together. The host himself had met them either at a ball, or at table-d'hôte, or in the street.

Señor de Silvis laughed loudly, talked

loudly, wherever he went, as rich foreigners always do. Not being able to gain entry into the Jockey Club, he collected around himself whatsoever he happened upon. He immediately asked for the address. The next day he sent an invitation for a small dinner-party.

He spoke all languages—indeed, even German. One could see that he was not a little proud when he called across the table, *"Mein lieber Herr Doktor!—wie geht's Ihnen?"*

And there was, too, a real bodily German doctor in the party, with an exuberant beard, as red as fire, and that smile of Sedan, worn by all Germans in Paris.

The temperature of the entertainment rose with the champagne. Fluent French and murdered French alternated with Spanish and Portuguese. The ladies leaned back in their chairs and laughed. The party was soon sufficiently acquainted to cast aside all embarrassment. Jesting and witty words flew over the table from mouth to mouth. The *"lieber Doktor"* alone discussed seriously with his neighbor—a French journalist, with a red ribbon in his button-hole.

And there was still another present who did not allow himself to be carried away with the general gayety. He sat at the right of Mademoiselle Adele. On her left sat her new admirer, the corpulent Anatole, who had been eating excessively of the truffles.

During the meal Mademoiselle Adele had attempted, by many harmless little devices, to enliven her neighbor on the right. But he remained quiet, answered courteously, but shortly and in a low voice.

She thought at first that he was a Pole; one of those most wearisome of creatures who travel about and play the despised. But she soon discovered that she had erred. That annoyed Mademoiselle Adele.

It was one of her many accomplishments to be able to distinguish, at the first glance, the many foreigners whom she encountered. And she was wont to declare that she could guess the nationality of a man as soon as he had exchanged ten words with her.

But this taciturn stranger was the source of much perplexity to her. If he had only been blond! Then she would at once have made him an Englishman, for he spoke like one. But he had black hair, a heavy dark mustache, and a fine petit figure. His fingers were remarkably long, and he had a peculiar way of crumbling the bread and playing with the dessert-fork.

"He is a musician," whispered Mademoiselle Adele to her corpulent friend.

"Ah," replied Monsieur Anatole, "I fear that I have eaten too many truffles."

Mademoiselle Adele again whispered some good advice into his ear, whereupon he laughed and appeared smitten with love.

Meanwhile, however, she could not neglect the interesting stranger. After she had enticed him to drink several glasses of champagne, he became livelier and more talkative.

"Oh," she suddenly cried out, "I perceive by your speech that you are certainly an Englishman!"

The stranger blushed and hastily replied, "No, madam!"

Mademoiselle Adele laughed.

"Pardon me," she said; "I know, Americans are always vexed when one takes them for English."

"I am not an American either," returned the stranger.

This was too much for Mademoiselle Adele. She bent over her plate and seemed very much embarrassed. Then, indeed, she observed that Mademoiselle Louison, sitting opposite to her, was delighted with her blunder.

The strange gentleman understood this,

and added, half aloud: "I am an Irishman, madam."

"Ah," uttered Mademoiselle Adele, with a grateful smile, for she was easily reconciled.

"Anatole—Irishman! What is that?" she whispered.

"They are the poor in England," he whispered in reply.

"So! — hem!" Mademoiselle Adele raised her eyebrows and cast a sly glance at her neighbor on the right. With one stroke he had completely swept away her interest in him.

DE SILVIS' dinner was excellent. They had been long sitting at the table. When Monsieur Anatole remembered the oysters, which had introduced the menu, they were to him like a pleasant dream. The truffles, on the contrary, continued to be to him a lasting reality.

The dinner proper was ended. Now and then some one lifted his glass again, or culled from the dish one of the choice fruits or little bonbons.

Tender-hearted, blond Mademoiselle Louison was lost in deep revery over a grape which she had dropped into her champagne glass.

"Look," cried Mademoiselle Louison, turning her great, liquid eyes toward the journalist; "see how the white angels bear a sinner toward heaven!"

"Ah, charming, *mademoiselle.* What a sublime idea!" cried the enraptured journalist in return.

Mademoiselle Louison's sublime idea made the circuit of the table, and was generally applauded. The frivolous Adele alone whispered to her corpulent admirer: "Really, 'twould take a whole host of angels to carry you to heaven, Anatole!"

The journalist, in the interim, knew how to grasp the opportunity and arrest the general attention of the company. Furthermore, he was happy at the prospect of escaping a wearisome political discussion with the German. And since he wore the red ribbon in his button-hole, and, in addition, had the matchless, important tone of a journalist, the entire party gave him audience.

He explained how small forces, when combined in operation, can bear such great burdens. And then he passed to the topic of the day:. The magnificent collections of the press for sufferers from the floods in Spain and for the destitute in Paris.

He had much to relate. Every moment he spoke of the press as "we," while in the heat of his eloquence he talked of "these millions which we have raised with such enormous sacrifices."

But each of the others also had his story to tell. Innumerable traits, small or noble, were revealed on these days of festivities and pleasures. And all of them savored somewhat of self-sacrifice.

Mademoiselle Louison's best friend, an unimportant lady, whose place was almost at the foot of the table, related, despite Louison's protest, how three poor sewing-girls had come to her own lodgings, and how she had made them sew the whole night on her gown for the celebration at the Hippodrome. Moreover, in addition to their wages, she had generously given these poor girls coffee and cake!

Mademoiselle Louison became suddenly an important personage at the table, and the journalist began to show her the most marked attentions.

These many noble incidents of benevolence and Louison's liquid eyes inspired the entire company with a feeling of repose, satisfaction, and sympathy for mankind, which was most eminently fitting to the weariness following the fatigue of the meal.

Indeed, this feeling of comfort mounted even a few degrees higher, when they

came to rest themselves in the soft armchairs of the little cool salon.

There was no other light here than the glow from the open fireplace. Its ruddy brightness stole softly across the English carpet and ascended to the golden cornices of the hangings; it played upon the gilded frames of the paintings, touched the piano which stood near the chimney; here and there it fell also upon a face, wonderfully illuminating and reclaiming it from the darkness. Otherwise nothing was visible except the red, glowing tips of cigars and cigarettes.

The entertainment began to flag; only a whisper now and then, or the clink of a coffee-cup disturbed the silence.

Every one seemed inclined to surrender himself distracted to the still enjoyment of his digestive powers and his philanthropic temperament. Even Monsieur Anatole forgot his truffles, while he stretched himself out in the low easy-chair near the sofa, on which Mademoiselle Adele had seated herself.

"Is there no one present who can give us a little music?" inquired Señor de Silvis. "You are always wont to be so obliging, Mademoiselle Adele."

"Oh dear, no—no!" cried *Mademoiselle*. "I've been eating too heartily!" At the same time, leaning back upon the sofa, she drew up her little feet, and, with a satisfied air, folded her hands across her breast.

But the stranger, the Irishman, emerged from his corner, and advanced to the piano.

"Oh! you're going to play something for us! Many thanks—Monsieur—hem, Monsieur——" Señor de Silvis had forgotten the name, a thing happening very often, indeed, with his guests.

"You see, he is a musician!" said Mademoiselle Adele to her friend. Anatole answered with a grunt of admiration.

There was something else. The others also perceived it at once, noticing the manner in which he sat down and struck a few chords here and there to awaken the instrument, as it were.

He then began to play—sportively, flightily, frivolously—just as the mood was upon him.

The melodies of the day whirled away into gay waltzes and tuneful glees; all those insignificant popular tunes hummed by all Paris for the past week he snatched up and executed with spirit and fluency.

The ladies cried out with astonishment, sang a few bars in accompaniment, beat time softly on the floor. The entire company followed him with intense interest. He had gained their sympathy, and carried them away with him from the very beginning. The *"lieber Herr Doktor"* alone listened with that Sedan smile. Such things were too simple for him.

But soon there was something for even the German. He nodded now and then somewhat approvingly.

A bit of Chopin burst forth and wonderfully accorded with the general temperament—the pungent fragrancy filling the air, the gay women, the men so frank, so unconcerned, each strange to the other, lost in the obscurity of the dusky salon, each following his own most secret thoughts, borne along by the mysterious, half-distinct, half-confused music, while the light of the open fireplace brightened now, now sank back again, causing everything golden to glimmer with a faint, trembling glow.

And now there was still more for the doctor. From time to time he turned toward de Silvis and motioned to him whenever the harmonious sounds suggested "our Schumann," "our Beethoven," or, indeed, "our famous Richard."

MEANWHILE the stranger continued playing, slightly inclined to the left, though without effort, in order to put

more force into the bass. It sounded as if he had twenty fingers—all of steel. He knew how to assemble a multitude of tones, so that the instrument itself produced one powerful, united, distinct sound. Not stopping, not marking the transitions, by ever newly recurring surprizes, imitations, happy combinations he fixed their attention so firmly that even the most unmusical person was forced to follow him with rapture.

Wholly unnoticed, the music changed its character. The artist played the deep tones uninterruptedly. He then inclined himself more and more upon the left, and there arose a wonderful commotion in the bass. The anabaptists of the *Prophet* approached with heavy steps; a knight from the *Damnation de Faust* mounted from the depths below with that desperate, hobbling, diabolical gallop.

More and more it rumbled and thundered in the deeper tones, and Monsieur Anatole began to feel the truffles anew. Mademoiselle Adele leaned half forward from the sofa; the music would not allow her to rest in peace.

Here and there the chimney-fire was reflected in a pair of black eyes staring fixed upon the player. He had bewitched them; they could now no longer detach themselves from him; he led them ever deeper down, down, down, where the sound was muffled and gloomily muttered with lamentations and threats.

"He manages his left hand marvelously," said the doctor. But de Silvis did not hear him; like the others, he sat in breathless suspense.

A mysterious, oppressive fear stole out from the music and brooded over the whole assembly.

The artist seemed to clench his left hand into a fist, which could never again relax, while with his right he cast hither and thither descants of sounds leaping aloft like sparkling flames. It sounded as if something dismal, horrible had been committed in the cellar, while those upstairs were dancing, laughing, and amusing themselves under the resplendent candelabra.

There was heard a sigh, a low cry from one of the ladies who felt unwell, but no one took notice of it. The performer was now wholly occupied with the bass, on which he was playing with both hands. His tireless fingers rapidly mingled the sounds together, so that cold chills ran up and down the backs of his hearers.

There was, however, a gradual ascension from the threatening, tumultuous lower sounds to the higher notes. The tones ran into each other, over each other, past each other, upward, ever upward, but never seeming to advance. There arose a wild tumult, a struggle to reach the top. They swarmed like little black demons, fighting, wrangling, full of raging wrath, feverish hurry, climbing, clinging, clenching with hands and teeth, each kicking, crushing the other with its feet, cursing, shrieking, praying—and, meanwhile, his hands glided along the keys so slowly, oh, so painfully slowly!

"Anatole," whispered Mademoiselle Adele, as pale as a ghost, "he is playing the 'Poverty!' "

"Oh, dear! — those truffles!" moaned Anatole, beginning to writhe with pain.

The salon suddenly became as bright as day. Two servants entered from behind the portière with lamps and candelabra. At the same moment the strange musician stopped playing, with all the might of his steeled fingers striking a discord so impossible, so startling that the entire party instantly sprang to their feet.

"Away with the lamps!" cried de Silvis.

"No, no!" shrieked Mademoiselle Adele; "come in with the light. I'm

afraid in the dark. Oh, the horrible creature!"

"Who was he?—yes,—who was he?" And they involuntarily thronged round their host. Nor did they notice that the stranger had slipped out behind the servants.

De Silvis tried to laugh it off by saying: "I think it was the devil. Come, let us go to the opera!"

"To the opera? Not for the world," cried Louison. "I won't listen to any music for a fortnight. Ugh! think of that crowd on the opera stairway!"

"Oh, my truffles!" howled Anatole.

THE company broke up. They all suddenly realized that they were strangers in a strange place. Each one desired to steal away home and be alone by himself.

On accompanying Mademoiselle Louison to her carriage the journalist said: "There, you see, that's the result of allowing one's self to be persuaded to accept the invitations of one of those half-barbarians. One never knows what sort of a crowd one will meet."

"Oh, dear, yes! He has quite put me out of humor," replied Louison, plaintively, all the time lifting her liquid eyes appealingly to him. "But won't you accompany me to Trinity? I know that a quiet mass will be read there at midnight."

The journalist bowed acquiescence, and took his place beside her in the carriage.

While Mademoiselle Adele and Monsieur Anatole, on the other hand, were passing the English apothecary in Rue de la Paix, the latter bade the coachman stop, and said, "No," beseechingly to her, "I think I must be put down here and have them give me something for my truffles. You won't be angry with me? But, you see—the music——"

"Please do not let it trouble you in the least, my friend. To be frank, I think that neither of us is in a specially happy mood tonight. Well, good-night! *Auf Wiedersehen* tomorrow!"

She leaned back in the cushions of the carriage. She felt relieved. She was alone. And the frivolous creature wept, as if she had been whipped! She was then driven home.

Of course Anatole was suffering extremely from the truffles, but it seemed to him that he felt better the moment the carriage rolled away.

Since the time that they had become acquainted they were never so satisfied with one another as at this very moment of parting.

But the one who had best recovered from the affair was the *"lieber Herr Doktor,"* for, being a German, he had become inured as far as the music was concerned.

Notwithstanding this, however, he resolved to stroll off to the *brasserie* Müller in Rue Richelieu, to drink over it a good square pint of German beer, with a bit of ham, perhaps.

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The Uncharted Isle

(Continued from page 608)

the low, liquid, many-vowelled words which they spoke to each other were not denotive of any recorded language.

None of them appeared to notice me; and I went up to a group of three who were studying one of the long scrolls I have mentioned, and addressed them. For all answer, they bent closer above the scroll; and even when I plucked one of them by the sleeve, it was evident that he did not observe me. Much amazed, I peered into their faces, and was struck by the mingling of supreme perplexity and monomaniacal intentness which their expression displayed. There was much of the madman, and more of the scientist absorbed in some irresoluble problem. Their eyes were fixed and fiery, their lips moved and mumbled in a fever of perpetual disquiet; and, following their gaze, I saw that the thing they were studying was a sort of chart or map, whose yellowing paper and faded inks were manifestly of past ages. The continents and seas and isles on this map were not those of the world I knew; and their names were written in heteroclitic runes of a lost alphabet. There was one immense continent in particular, with a tiny isle close to its southern shore; and ever and anon, one of the beings who pored above the map would touch this isle with his finger-tip, and then would stare toward the empty horizon, as if he were seeking to recover a vanished shoreline. I received a distinct impression that these people were as irretrievably lost as I myself; that they too were disturbed and baffled by a situation not to be solved or redeemed.

I WENT on toward the stone platform, which stood in a broad open space among the foremost houses. It was perhaps ten feet high, and access to it was given by a flight of winding steps. I mounted the steps, and tried to accost the people who were crowding about the armillary-like instrument. But they too were utterly oblivious of me, and intent upon the observations they were making. Some of them were turning the great sphere; some were consulting various geographical and celestial maps; and, from my nautical knowledge, I could see that certain of their companions were taking the height of the sun with a kind of astrolabe. All of them wore the same look of perplexity and savant-like preoccupation which I had observed in the others.

Seeing that my efforts to attract their attention were fruitless, I left the platform and wandered along the streets toward the harbor. The strangeness and inexplicability of it all were too much for me: more and more, I felt that I was being alienated from the realms of all rational experience or conjecture; that I had fallen into some unearthly limbo of confoundment and unreason, into the *cul-desac* of an ultra-terrestrial dimension. These beings were so palpably astray and bewildered; it was so obvious that they knew as well as I that there was something wrong with the geography, and perhaps with the chronology, of their island.

I spent the rest of the day roaming around; but nowhere could I find any one who was able to perceive my presence; and nowhere was there anything to reassure me, or resolve my ever-growing confusion of mind and spirit. Everywhere there were men, and also women; and though comparatively few of them were gray and wrinkled, they all conveyed

to my apprehension a feeling of immemorial eld, of years and cycles beyond all record of computation. And all were troubled, all were feverously intent, and were perusing maps or reading ancient pells and volumes, or staring at the sea and sky, or studying the brazen tablets of astronomical parapegms along the streets, as if by so doing they could somehow find the flaw in their reckonings. There were men and women of mature years, and some with the fresh, unlined visages of youth; but in all the place I saw but one child; and the face of the child was no less perplexed and troubled than those of its elders. If any one ate or drank or carried on the normal occupations of life, it was not done within my scope of vision; and I conceived the idea that they had lived in this manner, obsessed with the same problem, through a period of time which would have been practically eternal in any other world than theirs.

I came to a large building, whose open door was dark with the shadows of the interior. Peering in, I found that it was a temple; for across the deserted twilight, heavy with the stale fumes of burnt-out incense, the slant eyes of a baleful and monstrous image glared upon me. The thing was seemingly of stone or wood, with gorilla-like arms and the malignant features of a sub-human race. From what little I could see in the gloom, it was not pleasant to look upon; and I left the temple, and continued my perambulations.

Now I came to the waterfront, where the vessels with orange sails were moored at a stone mole. There were five or six of them in all: they were small galleys, with single banks of oars, and figureheads of metal that were graven with the likeness of primordial gods. They were indescribably worn by the waves of untold years; their sails were rotting rags; and

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no less than all else on the island, they bore the impress of a dread antiquity. It was easy to believe that their grotesquely carven prows had touched the eon-sunken wharves of Lemuria.

I returned to the town; and once again I sought to make my presence known to the inhabitants, but all in vain. And after awhile, as I trudged from street to street, the sun went down behind the island, and the stars came swiftly out in a heaven of purpureal velvet. The stars were large and lustrous and were innumerably thick: with the eye of a practised mariner, I studied them eagerly; but I could not trace the wonted constellations, though here and there I thought that I perceived a distortion or elongation of some familiar grouping. All was hopelessly askew, and disorder crept into my very brain, as I tried once more to orient myself, and noticed that the inhabitants of the town were still busied with a similar endeavor. . . .

I HAVE no way of computing the length of my sojourn on that island. Time didn't seem to have any proper meaning there; and, even if it had, my mental state was not one to admit of precise reckoning. It was all so impossible and unreal, so much like an absurd and troublesome hallucination; and half the time, I thought that it was merely a continuation of my delirium—that probably I was still drifting in the boat. After all, this was the most reasonable supposition; and I don't wonder that those who have heard my story refuse to entertain any other. I'd agree with them, if it weren't for one or two quite material details. . . .

The manner in which I lived is pretty vague to me, also. I remember sleeping under the stars, outside the town; I remember eating and drinking, and watching those people day after day, as they pursued their hopeless calculations. Sometimes I went into the houses and helped myself to food; and once or twice, if I remember rightly, I slept on a couch in one of them, without being disputed or heeded by the owners. There was nothing that could break the spell of their obsession or force them to notice me; and I soon gave up the attempt. And it seemed to me, as time went on, that I myself was no less unreal, no less doubtful and insubstantial, than their disregard would appear to indicate.

In the midst of my bewilderment, however, I found myself wondering if it would be possible to get away from the island. I remembered my boat, and remembered also that I had no oars. And forthwith I made tentative preparations for departure. In broad daylight, before the eyes of the townspeople, I took two oars from one of the galleys in the harbor, and carried them across the ridge to where my boat was hidden. The oars were very heavy, their blades were broad as fans, and their handles were fretted with hieroglyphs of silver. Also, I appropriated from one of the houses two earthen jars, painted with barbaric figures, and bore them away to the lagoon, intending to fill them with fresh water when I left. And also I collected a supply of food. But somehow the brain-muddling mystery of it all had paralyzed my initiative; and even when everything was ready, I delayed my departure. I felt, too, that the inhabitants must have tried innumerable times to get away in their galleys, and had always failed. And so I lingered on, like a man in the grip of some ridiculous nightmare.

One evening, when those distorted stars had all come out, I became aware that unusual things were going on. The people were no longer standing about in groups, with their customary porings and

discussions, but were all hastening toward the temple-like edifice. I followed them, and peered in at the door.

The place was lit with flaring torches that flung demoniac shadows on the crowd and on the idol before whom they were bowing. Perfumes were burnt, and chants were sung in the myriad-vowelled language with which my ear had become familiarized. They were invoking that frightful image with gorilla-like arms and half-human, half-animal face; and it was not hard for me to surmise the purpose of the invocation. Then the voices died to a sorrowful whisper, the smoke of the censers thinned, and the little child I had once seen was thrust forward in a vacant space between the congregation and the idol.

I had thought, of course, that the god was of wood or stone; but now, in a flash of terror and consternation, I wondered if I had been mistaken. For the oblique eyes opened more widely, and glowered upon the child, and the long arms, ending in knife-taloned fingers, lifted slowly and reached forward. And arrow-sharp fangs were displayed in the bestial grin of the leaning face. The child was still as a bird beneath the hypnotic eyes of a serpent; and there was no movement, and no longer even a whisper, from the waiting throng. . . .

I CAN not recall what happened then: whenever I try to recall it, there is a cloud of horror and darkness in my brain. I must have left the temple and fled across the island by starlight; but of this, too, I remember nothing. My first recollection is of rowing seaward through the narrow chasm by which I had entered the lagoon, and of trying to steer a course by the wried and twisted constellations. After that, there were days and days on a bland, unrippling sea, beneath a heaven

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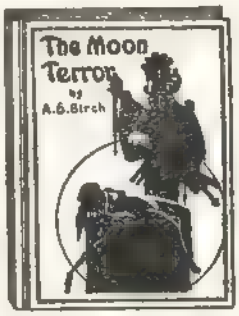

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of dazzling incandescence; and more nights below the crazy stars; till the days and nights became an eternity of tortured weariness; and my food and water were all consumed; and hunger and thirst and a feverous calenture with tossing, seething hallucinations, were all that I knew.

One night, I came to myself for a little while, and lay staring up at the sky. And once more the stars were those of the rightful heavens; and I gave thanks to God for my sight of the Southern Cross, ere I slid back into coma and delirium. And when I recovered consciousness again, I was lying in a ship's cabin, and the ship's doctor was bending over me.

They were all very kind to me on that ship. But when I tried to tell them my tale, they smiled pityingly; and after a few attempts, I learned to keep my silence. They were very curious about the two oars with silver-fretted handles, and the painted jars which they had found with me in the boat; but they were all too frank in refusing to accept my explanation. No such island and no such people could possibly exist, they said: it was contrary to all the maps that had ever been made, and gave the direct lie to all the ethnologists and geographers.

Often I wonder about it, myself, for there are so many things I can't explain. Is there a part of the Pacific that extends beyond time and space—an oceanic limbo into which, by some unknowable cataclysm, that island passed in a bygone period, even as Lemuria sank beneath the wave? And if so, by what abrogation of dimensional laws was I enabled to reach the island and depart from it? These things are beyond speculation. But often in my dreams, I see again the incognizably distorted stars, and share the confusion and bafflement of a lost people, as they pore above their useless charts, and take the altitude of a deviated sun.

THE CYPRESS-BOG

By **DONALD WANDREI**

Lethal waters sleep and swoon
By a cypress-veiled lagoon.
Flickering flames and fire-flies
Burn beneath the stagnant skies,
Lighting swamps and tarns unholy
Where miasmal stenches slowly
Rise from half-decaying logs
And the miles of rotten bogs.
Sucking sounds invade the night,
Air and water creatures fight,
Shrieking, thus to settle whose
That dead body in the ooze.
Footprints of a man-bat woven
With the fresher tracks of cloven
Feet are ended in a fen—
Neither thing will walk again.

The Master Strikes

(Continued from page 604)

his memory turned to the blue eyes and golden hair of the girl wife whom he had left across the river to seek and obtain aid from a relative in Love Lane.

There was a boy, too, back in Blois, where he had met the girl while working for her father, a boy whose name was Leon, but whose good looks were all his mother's.

As he thought of these things, the loss of Heaven itself seemed a slight thing beside those which he had gained.

A lark sang, not ten feet away, charmed with the freshness of the summer morning; the limpid air played softly among the leaves of the green bush, and below—children and women were dying horribly, their men-folk snarling defiance, dying with content if they had time to snatch a weapon and get their backs to a wall.

Gunnar sighed and lay close in his gutter.

After a long time the crowd dispersed and went raging away to other scenes, and there was a pitiful silence along the narrow street, where the dead lay thick and piled high around the doorways where they had been thrown from within, or where some householder bereft of all save life had made a furious stand, till even that was snatched away.

From afar cries of *"À bas Coligny! À bas les Huguenots!"* rose to the lofty rooftop, and again from a filthy street in the rear of his refuge he heard an indescribably savage chanting, a derisive version of a popular Protestant song:

"Hau! Hau! Huguenots!
Faites place aux Papegots!"

Like rats the Huguenots of Paris were being hunted down, and only Theophide

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Gunnar upon his roof-top was to know why.

The sun rose high and beat down mercilessly into the deep gutter, but the ragged refugee did not move.

From Love Lane, peopled only by the dead, a stench of a butcher's shambles drifted up. Still he waited patiently, though his nostrils wrinkled in distaste.

The afternoon waned and found him chewing the green leaves to assuage a burning thirst, while the sun, now hidden behind a cloud of smoke that hung low over towers and roofs, shone red and brazen as through a canopy of hell.

Beneath that pall the rattle of firing went on, now far, now near, while occasionally a frantic cry punctuated the dull uproar.

All day the drums had grumbled sullen gutturals of menace, and at nightfall a rolling volley of firearms and a clatter of hoofs betrayed the entering of a troop of horse into the desolated street.

Their leader was a young man, perhaps twenty or twenty-one, sitting his horse superbly. He wore a gray riding-coat and was a head taller than any of his companions. Jewels gleamed in his bonnet and there was pride in his face.

The riders that followed him were richly and handsomely dressed, though some wore corselets over satin coats and lace collars floated above jerkins of plain buff.

A herd of raving men straggled behind, their faces alight with furious glee, and a head borne aloft upon a pike was in a manner prophetic of Parisian amusements some two hundreds of years in the future.

The wolf-pack of Henri le Balafre, Duke of Guise, was hunting in the twilight for stray game!

Gunnar noticed that all wore bands of white around their left arms and white crosses in their caps and bonnets. With some elation, he had begun to tear a strip from his ragged shirt when his attention was sharply distracted by a movement in the huddle of bodies directly beneath him. A white arm had feebly lifted and as quickly dropped again.

Gunnar would have thought nothing of the matter had not a flash of green stones glittered on the pale wrist. With eyes sharpened by anxiety he pierced the shadows, saw a mass of golden hair and a lovely wan face that he knew well, although a trickle of blood had clotted upon the side of the dear head.

"Croisette!" he gasped and recognized his wife, whom he had thought safe in the Faubourg St. Germain, where no massacre had taken place.

The recognition had taken a brief part of a second; instantly he stared about to see if any had noticed the movement.

None too soon, he saw that the finger of Henri of Guise was pointing at the heap of bodies near the wall, and that he was turning as if to shout.

Apparently no other had seen the sign of life. His decision was instant. From the roof-top, the bellow of an arquebus awoke the echoes in the miserable street.

Guise reeled in his saddle and his bonnet was snatched from his head, shedding a sprinkle of jewels as it flew.

A howl went up from below, and a scattering, aimless volley clattered against the chimneypots.

Gunnar recoiled into his shelter, cursing his unsteady hand, while he reloaded with mad haste.

A shadow fell across him as he worked, and he looked up and over his shoulder with a fearful squint, when a voice spoke whose malignant accents he remembered well.

"Your work is wasted, Theophide; you have come to the end of your days!"

The dwarf, whom he had known as Guillame, his father's companion, sat cross-legged upon the mossy roof, leering obscenely at him.

Below, the men were beating in the house door as he continued silently with his loading. He tamped down the powder and the calm voice went on.

"Did you think, Gunnar, that you could outrace the long arm of the Master? I could have killed you in Brussels as I meant, had you not struck me down as I was changing. Death after that was too good for you; I planned that you should suffer. Would it interest you to know that I caused your wife to come here just as the killing began?"

The roar in the street below was louder now.

"Ten years ago, I began to spread the seed of calamity in Paris. It grew, blossomed and has fruited today. When will you mortals learn that the Master knows what you plan, far in advance of your childish plotting?"

Gunnar could hear the tramp of feet inside the house and knew that the hunters were climbing the crazy crooked stairways.

Doggedly he finished tamping his powder and dropped in the slugs, not replying to the taunting words.

"I knew," went on the Master, "when you and your woman came to Paris to seek aid from her uncle, so that you might cross to Scotland and secure the remainder of the key to the bishop's tomb. I am aware that your five-year-old son in Blois has the other half of the key and I am taking excellent care of him, I assure you. Excellent care! It is quite possible that whoever enters the tomb of the bishop may be surprized at what he

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finds there. In fact I feel certain that he will!"

He chuckled deep in his throat like a ghoul who unearths a freshly buried corpse at midnight.

Theophide Gunnar still did not speak, but swung the muzzle of the arquebus around till it pointed at the Master's black, naked chest and pulled the trigger. A haze of smoke hid the gloating face; it passed and the cackle of the Master's mirth rang out as the rabble came out upon the roof-top.

"Load again, Gunnar! Load again!" the monster cried. "Here are the bullets you loaned me! Load and try again, man!"

He cast the slugs in Gunnar's face, turned and vanished in the puff of powder smoke.

As THE men came near, Gunnar's brave heart failed. With the clarity of sight given to the dying, he perceived that he had lost his battle against the evil genius of his race; knew also that his cause was lost, that all over Paris men were dying because of his presence there; saw clearly that the very existence of a Gunnar anywhere meant sorrow and calamity for that place.

The foremost of the butchers that had drenched Paris in blood on that fateful day reached out a hairy hand to grasp him.

Theophide Gunnar poised upon the gutter edge, tall, straight, handsome, leapt and hung in air as a diver does and plunged headlong into the street.

He had chosen his spot, and when they came to him, they saw that peace was on his face. A trail of blood showed where he had dragged his broken body to a pile of corpses near a wall.

A white arm was around his neck and golden hair mingled with his own brown locks.

A man stooped to wrench away a green-gemmed bracelet from the pale wrist, and seeing that one of the twain still lived, he drove a pike through both and left them pinned together there.

After the Guisards had gone, the dwarf stood by them silently and bent down at a flicker of the man's eyelids. The eyes opened but saw nothing. The head rolled slowly sideways till his lips touched golden hair.

"Croisette!" fluttered the lips, and the eyes closed.

The Master followed the rioting Guisards where a roar of voices sounded. He was well content with himself and his battle with his enemy. The toll of massacre and intolerance that he had incited would go on until thirty thousand lay dead in Paris. A score was being piled up that would not be wiped out by all the dead in the great street-fight at Cahors.

Chatillon would ride through the faubourgs of Paris nine years later, remembering his father Coligny and giving no quarter, and still the tally would remain unpaid.

Men would be speared by hundreds at Courtas and Ivry and yet not one of the dead on the tragic Saint Bartholomew's day would be avenged, for the issue was Man as a race, against the Master, and not Catholic against Huguenot.

And the kindly concealing dark came down upon the deserted and quiet street which was called Love Lane.

A Million Years After

(Continued from page 598)

the sky as well, a great repulsive bulk, reptilian yet not scaly, patterned strangely with spots of vivid green and orange; a monster of one hundred million years ago when the earth was young and men as yet uncreated; huge, powerful, yet vulnerable as an insect to the man-made weapons of today. Its jaws, small in comparison to its size, were drawn back in the weird and sickly semblance of a smile. An object that no one in the crowd that collected cared to look long upon, save the curator of the museum, and even he turned away at last a little white about the lips.

"No one must touch it," he ordered. "It's the greatest find since the age of man, yet a bit of a problem as to how to remove it, and a good deal of red tape to be gone through with at that. . . . It is, unquestionably, the product of the lost dinosaur's egg that has somehow, somewhere, mysteriously hatched itself. We believed them to be petrified in the rock, yet in some miraculous way the germ of life was not destroyed." So the curator, his thin scholar's cheek flushed, his quiet eyes agleam, discoursed to the crowd about the obscene giant carcass in the morning sunlight.

The spot was roped off, and vehicles instructed to take the lower road. A police officer guarded each end so that no one could approach unchallenged. The crowd was not great. No one that looked once came again.

But in spite of what seemed an adequately protective guard a fateful thing happened that night. On either side of the road beside the spot where the mysteriously reborn extinct monster lay, stood two old barns stacked with hay. A care-

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less farmhand dropped a cigarette and went his way. Half an hour later they were a sheet of flame. Before either of the police guards could get to the nearest fire alarm box it was too late. It had been a dry summer.

In that mighty flame, that raging funeral pyre, the remains of the giant monster perished, leaving no trace of its lonely coming and haunted death save a few charred bones bearing no resemblance to the skeletons of today—as if the God of things as they are did not intend the lost and hidden works of an earlier grotesque age to survive even in effigy before the eyes of man.

Reconstruct it as you can from the titanic skeletons in the museum — it is enough. The completed monster, life-endowed, is not for our eyes. Even the curator of the museum shivers a little and pales as he describes it. For the rest it may be summed up in the words of the constable, Sam Hill.

"Wisht I'd never seen the blamed reptile—kinder comes back to me o' nights. They say as how men didn't walk on the earth till things got too small and hard for these here dinysores, an' that proves to my mind that God didn't mean the eye of man to look upon 'em. Good thing it *was* burned—that's what I says. What is one hundred thousand dollars and an extinct rep*tile* compared with a man's peace o' mind?"

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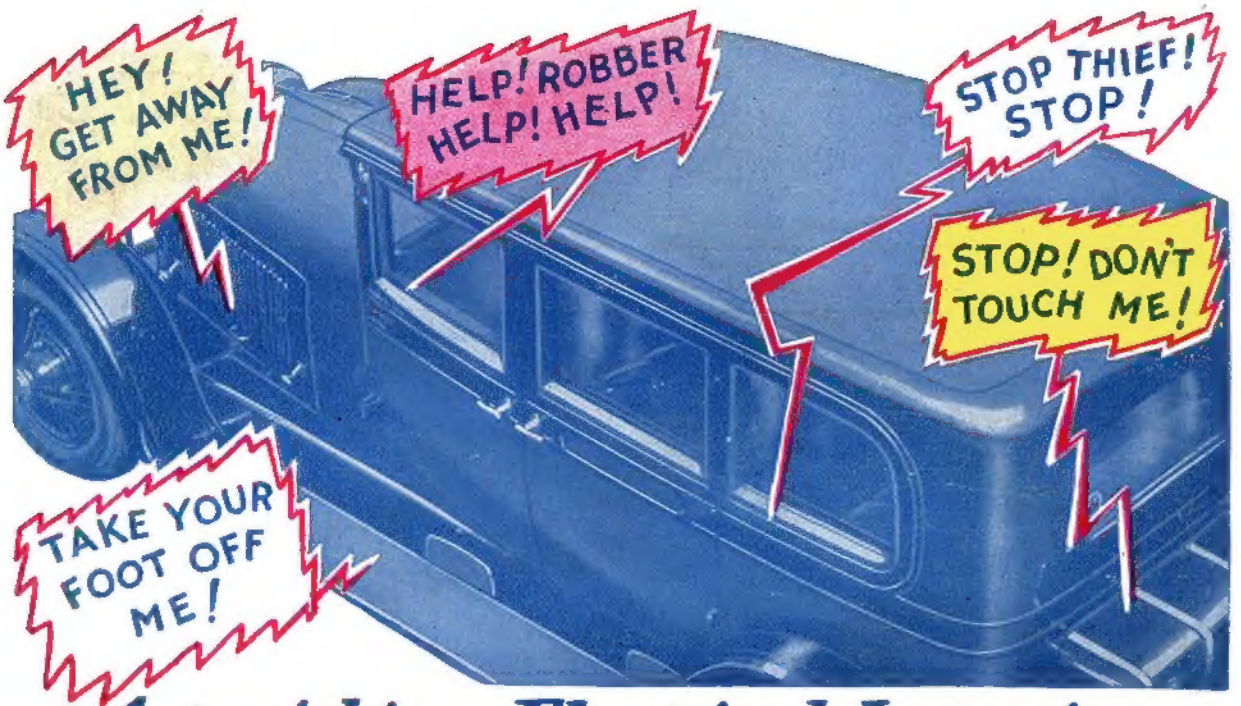

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